

Food security and nutrition as keys to human development



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HEARING (WORKSHOP)

Food security and nutrition as keys to human development

ABSTRACT

The increase of severe food insecurity is a major point of concern. At the request of the Parliament's Development committee, two briefings were prepared to explore the role of food security and nutrition as basic interventions in development policies. By drawing on a series of 'stories from the field', the first briefing showed the importance of focusing on supporting local food systems, while incorporating a household-centric view of crop diversification and resilience. The second briefing built further on those field insights to formulate a set of critical policy principles that can generate a sustained impact, and be applied to all food security programming environments, from relief to development to fragile food system environments resulting from extreme weather, pandemics, or violent conflict. The aspects raised by the briefings were further discussed at a DEVE hearing on 'food security and nutrition as keys to human development', which brought together various international and regional experts. This report presents the briefings together with the hearing report to highlight key aspects in the execution of the 'right to food' principle and the commitments from the Food Systems and Nutrition for Growth Summits as well as good practices in achieving food and nutrition security in different countries.

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Bottom-up approach to food security in development countries: from reality to strategy
Food security in development countries: policy reflections and investment priorities
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Food security and nutrition as keys to human development – Hearing report

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I. Working papers

BRIEFING

Bottom-up approach to food security in development countries: from reality to strategy

ABSTRACT

The rapidly deteriorating food security situation, especially in at-risk fragile states, requires a swift and strategic response. The skyrocketing cost of imported fuel, fertilizer, and seeds, even if available, no longer make import dependent agriculture a viable option for small farmers.

This brief presents examples from the field as to why priority must be given urgently to the rebuilding /expansion of local food systems. The resilient, flexible character of local food systems, with survival as the priority, are carefully designed by households (often lead by women) to optimize the natural resources available in their community.

Vulnerable food insecure farming families have their food production systems on full display showing what is important to them. Promoting a local food system policy means using a bottom-up approach. The brief highlights examples of how the approach is applied by households in a variety of situations to ensure their food security. From a programming standpoint, the European Union has policies, programmes, and local partners in place. The key to achieving a meaningful impact in the short and long term is to redouble efforts to listen and appreciate, and integrate the local knowledge, skills, and wisdom of those who farm to survive.

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CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EU	European Union
GM	Genetically modified
MFF	Multinational Financial Framework
MM	Micronutrient malnutrition
RTS	Root and tuber crops
UN	United Nations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

1 Introduction

The universal declaration on the Right to Food¹ has existed for decades (FAO, 'The Right to Food, n.d.). It is also a core aim of EU policy.¹ Over the years, there have been thousands of meetings and a special 'World Food Day' designated by the United Nations, reaffirming this right (FAO, 'World Food Day, 2021). Despite these efforts to highlight the importance of food security, it remains an ongoing challenge, especially for the most vulnerable (e.g., mothers and young children) (UN, 2020).

Since the end of the Second World War, rich-country donors of the Global North, institutional and individual, have positioned themselves as the 'doers', giving aid to the 'done-tos' in the Global South (Holcombe and Howard, 2019). This paradigm has not always been successful in regard to the Right to Food, as there has been an ongoing fundamental disconnect between how food-insecure farming households view their land and how donor-funded 'development' planners view that same land.

To better comprehend the disconnect, it is important to understand the profile of typical small, food insecure, subsistence growers, who produce an estimated 70 % of agricultural outputs in SSA²:

- They operate in survival mode. Their main focus and decisions are based on the need to eat today, not next week, or next month. Today.
- They are increasingly led by resource-poor mothers and young children.
- They cultivate small plots which are usually scattered and are often rented, not owned by the household.
- Understanding their food environment is essential for survival. Farmers can describe exactly why they combine specific crops in specific places in their land plots where they have wet soils, dry soils, rocky, hillside and swampland, soil rich in nutrients and poor in nutrients as well as using fences, the sides, and roof of dwellings, etc.
- They hunt, fish, and gather wild foods from the bush.
- The land is rainfed which adds to the unpredictability of the harvest.
- Depending on the weather pattern, they will consider increasing and or decreasing specific crops throughout the growing season.
- They set up risk-averse food systems to deal with predictable annual weather patterns including the wet, rainy season that often corresponds to the hungry season when there is little food until the crops are harvested and the dry season as well as unpredictable weather extremes, especially floods and droughts.
- They are well aware of the annual 'hungry season' and the impact it has on health and dietary choices. This could mean one meal a day or less.
- Crops often have multiple food functions. Various parts of a plant are often harvested through the growing season (leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds).
- They are opportunistic by selling or bartering small amounts of crops when the opportunity arises.

¹ In its 2014 resolution, the European Parliament insisted that public authorities must guarantee the three dimensions of the right to food and good nutrition: (i) availability, meaning that it is possible either to feed oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources or to establish well-functioning distribution, processing, and market systems; (ii) accessibility, meaning that both economic and physical access to food is guaranteed; and (iii) adequacy, meaning that food must be safe and satisfy the dietary needs of every individual.

² In SSA it is estimated that up to 70 % of agricultural production is grown on subsistence farms.

- They earn income by undertaking occasional day jobs on nearby farms.
- They are often in debt, especially during the rainy/hungry season, as they need to borrow money to eat, so their eventual harvest is already destined to lenders to pay off debts.
- Acute and chronic conflicts within households, communities, and outside insurgents also impact food production and food security. Emergency/conflict foods both cultivated (root crops, grains, and legumes) and wild are part of the household's food system.
- In sum, the resilience-driven survival mindset is to grow whatever they can, wherever they can, with whatever they have available locally so that they have something to eat every day.

Given these factors and many others, **households around the world have set up similar bio-diverse polyculture³ food forest systems** that provide a variety of food and non-food essentials for their survival). The structure and function of these complex and resilient food systems were thoroughly documented more than 70 years ago showing they are designed to optimise the output per unit of land to manage the risk of crop failure and reflect the specific needs of the household (Terra, 1954; Sommers, 1978) ;). They are based on indigenous and adaptable plant species that recycle nutrients, provide dietary diversity daily, make available a small amount of produce for sale, and are cost-effective as they do not depend on outside inputs to make the food system productive(.). (CGIAR, 2014)

In many cases, policy and programme decision-makers' answer to ending food insecurity for at-risk small plot farmers was to simplify their agro ecosystem by removing mixtures of crops and replacing them with one crop, ignoring dietary, economic, and ecological diversity as well as other multi-function aspects of polyculture. Maximising the yield of one type of plant per unit of land through monoculture instead of optimising the output per unit of land through polyculture set the stage for radical change in food system resilience.

This brief describes how food insecure farming families design resilience into their food production systems in order to mitigate shocks both chronic and acute. It examines how the use of a bottom-up approach is one method to address a household's right to food. This is a 'farmers first' participatory approach that facilitates the creation of local solutions to fit the farmers' realities.

The analysis, key messages, and lessons learned presented in the brief are primarily based on the author's decades of practice-based face-to-face interactions with farming households and other supply chain actors, last-mile outreach staff, planners, and policymakers in over 55 countries. It is a conversation on what works and what does not from both technical and programme management experience and presents ideas on how to make sure donor-funded development support to a household's right to food is meaningful and impactful. In addition to the author's personal experiences, media stories, grey literature, and peer-reviewed literature are also used.

2 A bottom-up approach to addressing 'the right to food'

This section includes examples that were chosen to represent different acute and chronic food insecurity situations and to show how vulnerable farming families deal with them while trying to maintain a resilient food system in the face of these challenges.

Undernutrition in the first 1000 days of life can cause serious and often irreversible health problems in the short and long term. The short term includes wasting (underweight for height) and the long-term stunting (short height for weight). Wasting is an acute situation where children lose weight rapidly due to health

³ The growing of multiple plants species in the same space designed to mimic nature's system mixing of plants.

and or dietary changes. Stunting can lead to permanent changes in the child's height (short) as well as the retardation of cognitive functions.

2.1 Nutrition security through dietary diversity: examples from subsistence households

Consuming a sufficient quantity of diverse high-quality foods is essential for maintaining good health. These include staple crops containing macronutrients and fruits and vegetables containing micronutrients. The challenge facing food-insecure farming households, who comprise a large portion of the malnourished globally, is how to consume enough quality food from the resources available locally.

2.1.1 Staple crops

Most of the calories in the diets of subsistence households are sourced from their own staple crops. The challenge for donor-funded development agencies is therefore how to improve food security in the small plots of lands designated primarily for the growing of staples (grains, starchy roots, and legumes).

While subsistence farmers have traditionally grown a variety of stable crops in a polyculture to reduce the risk of crop failure, governments have often singled out maize as the key grain staple crop for development. Maize is widely produced by millions of small farmers in SSA (Sub-Saharan Africa), so commercial fertiliser subsidy schemes abound. For example, in Malawi, the 'improvement' is aimed at maximising the yield of each maize plant primarily by means of a monoculture cropping system through the use of subsidised 'improved' seeds and commercial fertiliser. During a field visit, it was observed that a few farmers had refused to participate in the improvement project. Instead, they continued with the traditional risk-averse polyculture method of growing multiple staple crops, including maize, in case the rains failed. About midway through the growing season, a prolonged dry spell caused the maize crop to fail. The polyculture farmers also saw a decline in the maize but since sweet potato, cassava, pigeon pea, and peanut were also planted together the farmers were able to harvest these other more drought-tolerant crops.

The field site observation highlights an important programming lesson of first understanding the location-specific food production system and then identifying options for supporting improvements within that existing system. Maximising the yield of a single crop may not be the top priority for subsistence farmers whose survival depends on a steady source of food from their limited land.

2.1.2 Micronutrient crops

Micro-nutrient malnutrition also referred to as hidden hunger (HH), is a widespread nutrition and health issue that affects more than two billion people in developing countries – the vast majority of whom are mothers and young children.

MM can be addressed through the production and consumption of locally available micronutrient-dense foods (Dark green leafy, orange-fleshed fruits, beans) by households through home lot food gardens, and by the larger community through commercial crop supply chains.

A challenge for donor-funded projects is how to effectively support increasing availability and affordability

Home lot gardens

The following are examples from personal observations of a top-down approach from donor-funded development agencies contrasted by bottom-up approaches in practice today by resource-poor food-insecure households. This sounds intuitive but the reality regarding programming is vastly different.

Over many decades, support to gardens in the home lot for nutrition improvement through dietary diversity has been a favourite of the global development community. There are many reasons for this. The usual line of thought is that since it is land that women usually manage, then women will raise nutritious vegetables and they will use them in their family meals. They will also reduce purchases or stop buying

from the market altogether (save money and time). So, gardens are promoted by development agencies as women's empowerment and as a solution to closing dietary gaps, especially micronutrients.

The premise for promoting the garden concept is that households do not have gardens now and therefore need a prescriptive garden structure and agro-inputs to address the issues mentioned previously. These often include commercial seeds, tools, and commercial fertilisers. What happens in practice? Since most women are opportunistic and put a monetary value on their time, they raised these 'project' vegetables not so much for direct consumption to address dietary diversity but for sale to buy other essential household items. However, disappointment is often the result because all of the women in the community received the same package of seeds, and the plants all matured at the same time. As a result, there is an often surplus of produce and they cannot sell their produce. This creates anger and conflict between women as they are competing to sell into the same market as well as between women participants and the development agency promoting the garden project because there is no market for their crops, and they wasted their valuable time and limited resources.

However, a deeper programming issue that confirms one of the key themes of this brief, listening and observing, is the need to promote prescriptive garden plots in the first place. As discussed previously at-risk households are in survival mode. They know how to optimise their land, labour, and limited resources to feed themselves today. If they are not utilising the land in their home compound for food growing activities, there is a good reason, and it is not because they don't know-how.

A critical issue that usually gets the project design phase off on the wrong track is during the interview/data gathering process. The questionnaire does not ask the right question. The interviewer's questionnaire usually asks, 'do you have a home garden?' To which the respondent answers no. But that is not the right question. The real question is, do you grow food in your home compound? If the question is asked this way: 'do you grow food?' instead of having a garden, respondents will answer 'yes'.

To illustrate this crucial issue the following example is used. A national kitchen gardens programme in SSA (RCID, 2016) used a one size-fits-all prescriptive approach to promoting food gardens. Households were shown where to put their garden, how to prepare it, and what plants to grow.

During a community visit to assess the project, walking from house to house, success story after success story was presented of how this programme had informed women of the importance of vegetables in their meals and transformed the way they procure vegetables for the meals through the national garden programme.

One garden plot had a hugely different structure than the rest. It was not part of the project, but our group went and walked the garden with the women. Instead of the highly structured and prescriptive project garden, in her extremely limited space around her home she was growing more than 10 different fruit and vegetables and root crops all carefully mixed in a biodiverse food forest type structure. She explained why she planted certain plants together based on their compatibility. She explained the multi-purpose of each crop and strategic harvesting of different plant parts throughout the growing cycle. She explained the usefulness of each crop in her children's daily meals. Asked if she had learned this in a nutrition education class, she responded by saying she had never attended a class on nutrition, but just knew that traditionally meals should have a staple, beans and relish or sauce of greens or other vegetables. When asked what type of support she would like, she responded by asking for additional new varieties of the crops she now grows including, sweet potato, banana, squash, and beans. The request showed that biodiversity is a key goal for her garden. It also showed she was interested in incremental change to her garden structure not a whole-sale change in land use.

Fortunately, a government decision-maker for the national garden programme was on the field visit and now understood after this exchange that the national guidelines for promoting gardens needed to be

different. The top-down prescriptive approach needed to change to a bottom-up approach emphasising incremental changes to existing gardens.

Promoting home gardens as a way to empower women was another outcome of the field exercise. The exchange between the decision-maker with the woman who was not part of the programme but successfully grew crops her own way also illustrated that the top-down prescriptive approach of the programme, ignored how women already used their land to grow food, disempowering them by assuming that women, who have planted crops their entire lives and knew each square metre of their home lot land, did not know how to plant, where to plant, and what to plant.

An additional example of the importance of involving the end-user from the beginning comes from Melanesia. Women who had moved from the outer islands to the Solomon Islands' urban centre Honiara and who traditionally grew greens on their home island now had to buy them from the green market. They were forgoing them because they were too costly. Diet-related micro-nutrient issues were showing up during health clinic visits. One creative health care staff member decided to organise the women to grow their own greens just like back home. The women themselves decided on the name of their club: 'Sup-Sup Gaden'. Sup-sup (Pidgin English) means everything put into the family's soup-based meal.

The name reinforced the main purpose of the exercise: growing foods to fill in dietary gaps instead of the physical location of the crops. There was nearly a 20 % increase in new home food growing in the first year with many more households reporting an increase in crop diversity. The family surveyed reported an average weekly saving of 20 % by growing their own sup-sup vegetables. Produce sellers also reported increased sales which they attributed to the sup-sup garden project. Some 35 years later the Sup-Sup Garden Club continues to provide services to the community (Kaston Garden Association, n.d).

The examples show that the area around the home serves as a key site for addressing micronutrient malnutrition through the production of nutrient-dense crops. A key lesson for donor-funded activities is that their success rate for providing meaningful assistance will improve by using a bottom-up approach that builds on the household's existing food system. It also shows the importance of using a local service provider to deliver assistance to members of their community. They understand how to present information in ways that reflect cultural norms. Donor-funded development agencies must start from the current structure and function of the targeted households' gardens. Genuine and impactful assistance results from starting with the felt needs of each household. This sounds intuitive but the programming reality is often vastly different.

Nutrition responsive supply chains

Fresh foods that contain essential micronutrients, while needed in small quantities, are often expensive for resource-poor households with limited purchasing power and are therefore in low demand. As supply chain actors tend to respond to food demands from consumers, the question is: how could diet-related health and nutrition issues become drivers for agricultural value chain development? And what would/could be the important role of the donor-funded development community to encourage and support this challenge?

In recent years, there has been a renewed effort on a global scale to promote specific crops to address specific nutritional issues with a market demand structure. There is increasing evidence that the promotion of specific nutrient-dense foods can lead to increased demand by consumers. In Sierra Leone, focusing on a specific food, pumpkin, led to the expansion of the small farmer commercial supply chain (USAID, Spring, n.d.). The Sup-Sup Garden Programme (see above) has successfully promoted micro-nutrient-dense foods for over 35 years.

Initial data from Harvest Plus, a global organization promoting the production and consumption of bio-fortified foods show that promotional efforts are yielding positive results. Small-plot commercial growers

are actively participating in these demand-driven chains with several biofortified crops including orange flesh sweet potato and iron-rich beans.

Jou Mou Soup

In Haiti, the consumption of micronutrient-dense pumpkin, primarily in Jou Mou soup, is a tradition. While under French colonial rule, Haitians were limited to eating a bland bread soup. They were not permitted to eat such an extravagant meal comprised of pumpkin, beef stock, and other vegetables. This unique soup was created by Haitians as a symbol of unity in the face of adversity. It was served to everyone at the first Independence celebration and Haitians continue this tradition today. Haitians believe the fight for equality isn't over yet. They believe the pumpkin soup gives them the courage to persevere over oppression, both now and in the future. The Jou Mou story was used as the basis for designing a pumpkin promotion initiative in response to the earthquake in 2010. This example shows how to create demand for a micro-nutrient dense food not with nutritional science but through messages with deep cultural significance.

These examples also show that creating demand requires context-specific behavioural change messaging. The example from Haiti just like the 'Sup-Sup Garden' emphasises promoting the cultural aspects of the issue over the technical/nutritional benefits.

The key message for policymakers is that these examples show that a demand-driven strategy for micro-nutrient dense foods can work, and the model can be adapted to specific locations using culturally accepted, locally known, and locally grown nutrient-dense crops.

2.2 Fragile food environments: the role development assistance in building resilient food systems

The majority of vulnerable food-insecure farming households live in fragile food environments in countries with tenuous governments. These households are on their own to a great extent due to their government's limited reach outside of urban centres and limited ability to provide quality services.

The ongoing challenge for a vulnerable farming family's right to food is put under increased pressure when they experience extreme events outside of their control. The built-in resilience of local food systems to reduce the risk of food insecurity is quickly eroding. The hungry have few choices: they can migrate in search of food, pilfer food from others (conflict) or die of starvation. The question for policymakers is how to improve their readiness to anticipate extreme events to reduce the potential for disaster as well as to respond effectively to stabilise and rebuild resilient local food environments.

2.2.1 Conflict

Experts agree that conflict is the main driver of acute food insecurity (FSIN, 2020), affecting almost 100 million people, up from 77 million in 2019.⁴

Food insecurity can be a driver as well as a consequence of conflict. Conflicts take many forms including conflicts between non-state outside insurgents, between communities, within communities, between households, and within households. These conflicts can be acute/seasonal and/or chronic based on weather and cropping/livestock herding cycles in the local food environment. The challenge for development assistance is to provide strategic support that supports the local food system using a 'do no harm' lens. This means ensuring policy and programme investments do not diminish local food system stability by decreasing food availability, access, and adequacy. Using this lens is crucial to achieving

⁴ Where food security is an ongoing challenge due to a complex web of factors including climate/weather, conflict, physical /biological environment, economic, socio-cultural, and others.

stability as standard or inappropriate assistance that is not context-specific can actually contribute to additional conflict.

Communal clashes

Communal conflicts between pastoral and cultivator communities in SSA are a centuries-old dilemma. One source of conflict arises when the customary land use cycle is broken. Traditionally there was an understanding that livestock from herd clans could graze cultivated land at the end of the cultivation period. Livestock feeds on the crop residue and fertilises the soil at the same time. It was seen as a win-win for both herding and cultivator clans.

A donor-funded development agency working with small farmers in Northern Uganda determined that it was technically feasible to produce one more quick-yielding bean crop at the end of the traditional rainfed growing season. A large trial plot of beans was set up and fenced off. It was observed that the fence prevented the livestock from entering and consuming their traditional source of feed. This resulted in conflict. It was also preventable if a cultural 'do no harm' lens had been applied by the donor funded agency as traditional land use rights are known by the local communities.

Armed insurgents

Most armed insurgent activities take place in rural areas amongst crop and livestock communities. They exploit existing food insecurity and/or contribute to further food insecurity as a way of exercising control over the community. Insurgents take advantage of communal conflicts which often revolve around the use of agricultural land. Their actions impact every link in the local food supply system.

Increasingly, security challenges for civilian field staff both international and local have become a real constraint to providing critical food security assistance to communities in conflict areas. One way to continue this vital community service link in Africa could be through NATO's Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) in the African Union's Standby Force. Local defence forces could be trained on how to secure local supply chains in armed conflict environments. An example from Afghanistan illustrates how it is implemented. Nearly 85 % of the population is engaged in the food system and as the security situation for civilian field staff from development agencies became so dangerous, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) member, the United States, decided to train civil affairs service personnel to provide limited and strategic services to Afghan farming families to help stabilise their household food system. They received basic training before their deployment to Afghanistan through Agriculture Development Afghanistan Pre-deployment Training (ADAPT) on how to identify insurgent actions that threaten local food systems and options for taking appropriate action with Afghan defence forces to reduce or eliminate the threat.

The ADAPT local food system stability model, used by ISAF in Afghanistan, applies an action-oriented supply chain framework based on crop and livestock production calendars to identify flashpoints for potential conflict, and identify local solutions for mitigating the potential for conflict (ADAPT, Facebook page).

2.2.2 COVID-19

COVID-19 and its dramatic impact on economic stability has replaced the weather as the second most important driver of acute food insecurity (World Economic Forum, 2021). The true impact of COVID-19 on local food systems is still unfolding. What is clear is that actions taken to contain the spread of the pandemic have disrupted the global food system. The disruption of the flow of food imports, as well as agricultural exports, has resulted in the right to food for the rural poor coming under increased pressure and negatively impacting nutrition and health, especially the vulnerable in SSA.

For several decades, small farmers have been changing the structure and function of their limited lands to grow commercial crops for national and international markets. This is a high-risk strategy even without

COVID, and it has been controversial in terms of increasing food security. Localised food systems have shown their resilience as they are less susceptible to disruptions in the food supply (Harvest Plus, n.d.).

Small commercial farming families in South Asia and Africa came up with innovative, resilient, bottom-up methods of adjusting their cropland to reduce risk in response to the fallout from COVID-19 (International Institute for Environment and Development, n.d.). In India, some farmer's food security coping strategy was to switch from raising their commercial crop of fresh flowers to cultivating nutrient-dense crops that they usually purchased from the shop. In Morocco, the farmer could no longer afford nor even find commercial agro-inputs for sale. So, to keep their commercial operation going they decided to tap traditionally used and locally available inputs, such as organic fertiliser from crops and livestock as well as recycle supplies that would normally be used only once.

2.2.3 Weather extremes

Weather extremes and other environmental hazards were the main drivers of acute food insecurity for 15 million people in 2020, down from 34 million the year before (CGIAR, Gender Platform, 2021). Rural farming communities are often disproportionately impacted through both the loss of productive assets and the need to purchase food.

From 2000-to 2019, nearly 7 000 disasters were recorded worldwide, a rise of 83 % from the previous two decades, with floods increasing by 134 % over that same period and extreme temperature events by 232 % (Global Humanitarian Overview, n.d.).

Loud emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, tidal surges, earthquakes, and volcanoes offer a special programming opportunity for promoting biodiversity as outreach staff and households are often focused on stabilising the situation to get things back up and running quickly.

Silent emergencies, especially long-term droughts are more challenging as the sense of urgency is not as intense as with a loud emergency. For vulnerable farming households, silent emergencies are often more difficult to deal with.

Most countries have national disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans. Most call for large-scale activities run by the government. Food-insecure households have their own version of DRR through understanding their local food environment. To the extent possible, they develop resilient bio-diverse cropping systems that include cultivated 'emergency' crops as well as wild sources of food.

Root and tuber crops (RTCs) are key emergency crops for both chronic and acute weather events. RTCs are drought tolerant (especially cassava), and suffer minimal damage from hurricanes/typhoons, and cyclones; they can also be consumed over an extended period after an acute weather event and recover quickly. Farmers in different agro-climatic zones designed their food systems taking into account typhoon-resistant food crops.

2.2.4 Relief to development: food system recovery after a natural disaster

The main aim of providing donor funded disaster relief is to assist at risk households in quickly rehabilitating their subsistence-food-growing environment following a disaster. As someone who has been involved with relief to development schemes, experience demonstrates that some donors provide useful assistance but can also see it as an opportunity to introduce 'improvements' to the local food system. These improvements are often not available locally and as such are frequently provided by donors at no cost to disaster victims. However, the future replacement costs for these improvements are the household's responsibility. The examples that follow briefly illustrate the importance of prioritizing the rebuilding of the local food system by using local resources as the most effective way to achieve food security.

Subsistence households

The bottom-up self-reliance approach which emphasises optimising the use of local knowledge skills and resources was used in the recovery of an island's food system in the aftermath of a major hurricane and tidal surge. In collaboration with the island households, a 3 pronged plan was developed where they would (1) rapidly assess the locally grown foods that remained edible after the disaster and for how long, (2) based on the results of the assessment the island households would receive immediate support in terms of replacement of traditional planting materials destroyed as a result of the disaster to assist with the immediate recovery of their self-reliant food system, and (3) after consumption of locally grown foods, provision of imported emergency foods would start for a set period to allow for the local food system to recover. This model proved successful as minimal funds were used for purchasing and transporting imported foods to the island.

Small commercial farms

While it is tempting for aid agencies to respond to emergency appeals by distributing resources to households, using a 'do no harm' approach can reveal potential short-term and long-term problems (Harvest Plus, n.d.). In Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, aid agencies were tripping over each other to hand out agricultural supplies sometimes to the same group of households (Center for Public Integrity, 2012). Local farmers were told by aid agencies that they did not need to buy seeds and other agro-inputs needed to start the recovery of their food system as they would be providing them. However, bureaucratic delays meant many of the seeds arrived too late, were not right for the season, and were hybrids that could only be used once. Moreover, agro supply merchants complained that their businesses were impacted severely by the numerous donor giveaway programmes. This affected the recovery process as the existing agro supply chain had been disrupted and some suppliers went out of business. Because the supply chain was broken, once the aid stopped households were hampered in their ongoing recovery. In addition, giving away supplies can also cause conflict. There are often not enough supplies to go to every disaster victim so those who were left out sometimes resorted to theft and/or damage to supplies.

While there remains a need to provide disaster victims with food in context-specific circumstances, in recent years there has been increasing recognition by aid agencies that the provision of vouchers and/or mobile money to farming households for use at local input supply dealers instead of giving away supplies is a sound way to accelerate recovery by supporting local agriculture supply chains and promoting local produce markets.

The main message regarding fragile food environments is that vulnerable food-insecure households operate in survival mode. They need to eat daily from this challenging environment. Crop diversification is their key risk reduction strategy for building a resilient household food system. The main lesson for policy and programmes aimed at improving fragile food environments is the need to incorporate a household-centric view of crop diversification and resilience.

3 Lessons learned – hiding in plain sight

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028) focusses attention on the important role small farming families play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (FAO, Family Farming Knowledge Platform, 2019). The central issue facing decision-makers on how best to address small farmer food insecurity is summed up by National Geographic (2014), 'Today we find ourselves in need of another green revolution. There are two competing visions of how it could happen: the high-tech route, which includes genetically modified (GM) crops; or, an alternative vision, which consists of a farming system more mindful of the landscape and ecological resources.'

This paper has presented a few examples from the field of bottom-up approaches designed by vulnerable households to ensure their own food security by growing their own food. The food insecure are focused

on eating today, not tomorrow, next week, or next month. Household decisions and actions are geared toward survival. The multiple story polyculture food system configuration, which mimics nature's polyculture structure, provides for a variety of food and non-food essentials. The close loop regenerative system based on biodiversity continuously provides for dietary diversity as well as the selling of a small amount of produce. It requires minimal capital to operate as it is built according to the natural flows and nature-based resources.

Over the past several decades, bottom-up food systems have been under pressure from the outside to change from closed-looped polyculture to one-way flow monoculture. These are two entirely opposed systems. The former is nature-based and functions by listening to and working with nature while the latter is capital-based and works by disregarding and replacing natural processes with external commercial inputs and seeds into local food environments. Global warming coupled with the continuing fallout from COVID-19 and Russian Ukrainian conflict has shown the serious shortcomings of promoting food production based on external agro-inputs and the continued resilience of nature-based polyculture in meeting local food needs for at-risk households.

Household food security is an extraordinarily complex web of intertwined factors, for which there is no singular magic bullet, one size fits all, top-down 'crop production package' solution that fits all household situations. However, there is a one-size-fits-all bottom-up approach that can be applied to all situations. It starts with a mindset of a) first listening and understanding the current land use aims of at-risk farming households, then b) working in partnership to identify incremental options for filling in gaps to strengthen their home food system and safeguarding their right to food. This approach appeared as a common thread throughout the brief as it applies to all subsistence food environments. The future of healthy local food systems and the hundreds of millions of farming households who depend on them every day is at stake.

Vulnerable food insecure farming families have their food production systems on full display showing what is important to them. The donor-funded development community should consider redoubling their efforts to support incremental changes to local food systems that should lead to improving the right to food. It is the model that will produce a quick and sustained impact. Hundreds of millions of farming households around the world await the decision.

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BRIEFING

Food security in development countries: policy reflections and investment priorities

ABSTRACT

The food insecure are focused on what they will eat today. Not next week or next month, today. Subsistence farming households, which are increasingly managed by women, endeavour to set up flexible resilient, bio-diverse, polyculture food production systems for their daily survival. These survival systems are designed to operate in fragile and fluid food environments and therefore need to function in the face of multiple acute and chronic threats including weather extremes, a wide range of conflicts, pandemics, economic shocks, etc.

Genuine support to building stability starts from listening to farmers and understanding the structure and the function of a subsistence household's food system. It begins by appreciating what they are doing right already. From there, "The Right to Food" gaps in terms of food availability, access, adequacy, stability can be identified. Then, by applying a do no harm lens to the existing food system, incremental, local solutions can be found to produce a quick and sustained impact. This "bottom-up" approach may not be flashy, it may not be transformative, but gradual changes to the food systems of the risk-averse, food insecure, are meaningful and significant.

The European Union has policies and programmes in place that support local food system resilience. It is time to ensure the bottom-up approach is being implemented effectively in EU country programmes.

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Table of acronyms

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EU	European Union
GM	Genetically modified
MFF	Multinational Financial Framework
MM	Micronutrient malnutrition
RTS	Root and tuber crops
UN	United Nations
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

1 Introduction

The EU has produced several important 'Right to Food' related documents and is acting at multiple levels to promote a global transition to sustainable food systems. This is being done through important initiatives including the 'Farm to Fork' and 'Green Alliances and Partnerships' (European Commission, n.d., (a)) that address environmental challenges and support partner countries' transitions in line with the European Green Deal.

At the operational level, the existing EU cooperation agreement structure (i.e. the Multiannual Indicative Programmes/ Global Europe programming) views sustainable agriculture, food, and nutrition security as a priority sector in over 60 EU-supported partner countries under the current MFF 2021-2027 (European Commission, n.d., (b)).

The 2022 DEVE Draft Report, *Food Security in Developing Countries* (European Parliament), identifies many of the issues addressed in this policy brief, and highlights 'the need for policies to be country-driven, needs-based and context-appropriate as food systems are very diverse; recalls that priority should be given to local food production'.

In short, **the EU structure is in place and so it is time to ensure the Right to Food framework is incorporated, operational, and being implemented effectively in programmes for improving local food security. This is especially urgent given the loud emergencies resulting from the combination of COVID-19 and the Russian Ukrainian Conflict.**

Stories from the field (Brief 1) show the importance of focussing on supporting **local food systems**. The bottom-up approach presented in Brief 1 requires an EU policy and programming cycle that starts with its 'Right to Food' framework and then applies a set of critical principles, listed below, to that framework. The principles are universal and can be applied to all food security programming environments, including relief to development, fragile food system environments resulting from weather, pandemics, and or violent conflict. The bottom-up approach will produce a quick and sustained impact:

2 Applying the 'Do No Harm' principle in food security policy

In its 2014 resolution, the European Parliament insisted that public authorities must guarantee the three dimensions⁵ of the right to food and good nutrition: (i) availability, meaning that it is possible either to feed oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources or to establish well-functioning distribution, processing, and market systems; (ii) accessibility, meaning that both economic and physical access to food is guaranteed; and (iii) adequacy, meaning that food must be safe and satisfy the dietary needs of every individual.

To assess whether the three dimensions are clearly prioritized in policy and programme activities, a set of key principles need to be applied. At the top of the list is 'do no harm'. **This means ensuring policy and programme investments do not diminish local food system stability by decreasing food availability, access, adequacy as well as stability/resilience.**

An example of doing no harm not being applied is the kitchen gardens project in Brief 1. While the stated aim of the government-managed project was to empower women to address micronutrient malnutrition through the production and consumption of vegetables from the home garden, the top-down, prescriptive, one size fits all strategy was not appropriate nor sustainable by households. The model gardening system was irrelevant to the way the women grew their food. The traditional way of growing

⁵ Other organisations including the UN recognise a fourth pillar: stability.

was to plant crops throughout the home lot, not in defined high structured plots. In short, the kitchen gardens project did not help with the right to food issues faced by food-insecure households.

If a “do no harm” lens had been used during the assessment phase, the lens would have shown that women already had an existing food production system in the home compound. The traditional way of growing was to plant crops throughout the home lot, not in defined high structured plots. While their existing layout was not the model promoted by the government, it still met the needs of the household. If the programme design stage had started with the existing structure and function instead of changing the agricultural landscape, a strategic and context specific gap-filling strategy could have been applied to address the availability, access, adequacy, and stability of micronutrient-dense food crops in the home lot compound. Then, by using an empowerment strategy of working in partnership with women and by valuing the household’s existing food system, incremental changes to crop and dietary diversity would have been likely outcomes. This is the very definition of empowerment.

The following components are fundamental in using a ‘do no harm’ lens within the ‘Right to Food’ Framework. They are applicable in all food insecurity situations, especially for at-risk subsistence households.

2.1 Incremental changes to existing local food systems through a strategy of ‘gap-filling’ or ‘closing gaps’

It starts with a mindset of recognizing and valuing the structure and function of a household’s food system and asking some critical questions. For example:

- What are the food gaps?
- Why are there gaps?
- When are these acute?
- How can the gaps be closed using existing local available knowledge, skills, and resources?
- What options are there for investments that provide direct support to at-risk households and the larger community through local commercial supply chains?

A gap filling strategy might not be as attention-grabbing or “transformational” as a wholesale transformation of their existing food growing system, but as the national gardening programme example in Brief #1 demonstrated, undernourished households are risk averse and already have their own food growing systems. For them, an incremental approach that allows them to achieve a year-round supply of nutritious food daily from their own resources is the right one.

From a programming standpoint, gap filling is more challenging as it shifts from product to process-oriented development. Endogenous knowledge-driven development maximizes participation and decision-making with end-users by identifying local solutions to local problems.

2.2 Knowledge-driven instead of asset transfer-driven

Ensure that food security policies, programmes, and activities no longer underestimate the value of local food system knowledge and priorities by seeing households as mere ‘beneficiaries’ requiring outside commercial inputs and prescriptive changes in land use to solve their daily food security issues. My experience with managing donor-funded food security field activities is that most are project-oriented with fast-track timelines and high impact expectations. That usually means they are prescription-oriented with benchmarks and assessments based on the delivery of agro-inputs to “project” households and the outputs/outcomes of those inputs.

One difficulty with this approach is that households are not on the same timeline as a project. When it comes to making changes to their subsistence food system, they are often cautious because an incorrect

decision could have serious food security implications. Instead of promoting “advanced” food production based on external commercial agro-inputs, donor funds could be better spent supporting incremental crop diversification solutions to dietary gaps in the existing food system.

2.3 Programmes are more strategic and specific

As an alternative to supporting the ‘Right to Food’ in general, use a strategic, location specific implementation approach that will resonate with the way food insecure households view their home food system which is according to seasons: hungry season (usually wet), and dry season. For example, focus on specific approaches to closing the hungry season gap and/or extending the time food can be produced in the dry season.

Since food security, nutrition, and health are linked, programmes should be designed and implemented around a key health problem such as anaemia or child stunting. While they are not caused by a single factor, they are good themes for organizing resources from key public and private sectors to address these issues within context-specific environments. It is often a matter of framing the issue in ways that can be understood by different actors. What is the role of agriculture, the business sector, health, and others in contributing to solving stunting or the closing dietary gaps as a way to expand local agricultural supply chains?

2.4 Ensure biodiversity is paramount in policy, programs, and field activities

Examples in Brief #1 show that a resilient food system starts with the proper design of a bio-diverse agricultural landscape. The various functions of a sound agro-ecosystem then fall into place: dietary diversity, income diversity, agro-economic stability, carbon capture, etc.

Bio-diversity impact indicators need to be applied to reflect the ‘right to food theme’ (availability, access/affordability, and adequacy). This can be done through a well-designed field programme where incremental change is promoted by building up existing household food systems, through gap-filling (plants/foods), to intensify land use (multi-species, mixed cropping) diversifying the plant resource base by adding varieties of multipurpose plants already known and grown by households (root crops, bananas, squash, and beans).

2.5 Nature-based agro-inputs

The lack of availability and affordability of high priced imported agricultural inputs are now a major constraint in the production of certain food crops, negatively impacting food security for the foreseeable future.

To address the growing food supply gap, countries need to look inward to recognize and support local agro-inputs that can be used to feed their population. The bottom-up approach calls for the identification and promotion of production inputs from local resources. There are ample examples of nature-based production systems for every agro-environment. Ask the question, how would nature solve this issue? Biodiverse food production is designed to work with nature by leveraging the local natural flows and resources. Its closed-loop regenerative processes recycle nutrients and reduce pest damage. The commercial supply chain framework can be used to identify local bio-friendly options for planting materials, organic fertilizer, bio-safe pest management, food processing using renewable energy, and storage units made from local materials. Ensure programme investments support the production and purchase of locally sourced agro inputs.

3 Conclusion

The cornerstone of development assistance is to provide funding and financing to develop resilient models that work and can then be adapted and scaled up.

The frameworks, policies, partnerships, and programmes to develop such models are in place and are operational in EU-partner countries. The technology to productive bio-diverse agro-ecosystems based on location-specific natural and renewable resources is known. Dietary solutions for specific nutrition and health issues are known.

A key challenge is to identify and invest in effective accelerators of service delivery, especially in the “last mile” where the food insecure live. It starts with the right agents of change with a cultural understanding mindset of a) first listening and understanding the current land use aims of at-risk farming households, then b) working in partnership to identify incremental options for filling in gaps to strengthen their home food system and safeguarding their right to food.

Vulnerable food insecure farming families have their food production systems on full display showing what is important to them. EU development policy should **ensure these existing food systems are used as the starting point for effective programming**, as such:

- For the food insecure subsistence farming sector, a bottom-up approach, where incremental changes are based on the existing structure and function of land used by households, as well as their knowledge, skills, and use of local resources.
- For small-scale commercial farmers, EU support should be to prioritize programming support and investments for in-country market-driven supply chains that produce specific nutrient-dense crops to address specific health and nutrition issues.

The future of productive healthy local food systems and the hundreds of millions of farming households who depend on them every day are at stake.

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II. Hearing (workshop) proceedings

HEARING (WORKSHOP) PROCEEDINGS

Food security and nutrition as keys to human development

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Table of acronyms

AUDA-NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
EC	European Commission
ESG	Environmental, social, and governance
EU	European Union
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
ROPFA	West African Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers
UN	United Nations
UNFSS 2021	UN Food Systems Summit 2021

1 Executive summary

On Tuesday 22 March 2022, The Development Committee of the European Parliament held a hearing on 'Food Security and Nutrition as Keys to Human development'⁶. The hearing, which took place at the European Parliament in Brussels and consisted of stakeholders as well as experts on the subject of the right to food.

Several speakers noted that the hearing was timely, as it was held in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which negatively affected both food systems in the world, and the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The hearing was mostly focused on small scale and family farmers, as they produce 80 % of the food consumed in the world. It was highlighted that among these small scale and family farmers, about 50 % are women, and yet they suffered disproportionately from lack of resources and malnutrition.

To achieve Zero Hunger, it is crucial that we acknowledge proper nutrition as a right. For the participants, this means moving away from a market lacking sufficient and appropriate regulations, which sees food, as well as resources that enable the production of food, as ground for speculation, towards a system that first of all ensures the feeding of humanity. A transition is needed from a mindset primarily based on economic growth to one based on social and environmental sustainability and resilience.

Investments in agriculture have been proven to be more effective in reducing poverty than investments in any other sector. Evidence also shows that it is possible to both produce more sustainably and in higher volumes at the same time. This can be done by creating shorter and more resilient food systems.

To do this, we need to first listen to the people at the beginning of the food chain, meaning the small scale and family farmers. We can then provide context-based solutions and resources that have been proven to be meaningful and impactful.

2 Welcome and introduction

Tomas Tobé, Chairman of the Committee on Development

In opening the hearing, the Chairman highlighted the timeliness of a debate on food security, given the increasing numbers of people suffering from malnutrition worldwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This issue is now being exacerbated by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022.

Indeed, Russia and Ukraine are two very big producers of grain and fertilisers, and this conflict will have a significant negative impact on food security both domestically and internationally.

The Chairman hopes that the first panel of experts will bring answers on how we can recover and learn from the drawbacks brought upon by Covid-19. He hopes to hear how the commitments made at the UN Food Systems Summit 2021⁷ (UFSS 2021), and the Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021⁸ can contribute to the amelioration of global food security.

The second panel should be particularly relevant in the context of the current Ukraine invasion. Indeed, this war underlined the vulnerability of staple food import-dependent countries, and as a result the Chairman would like to hear about how we can put more focus on resilience-building and local food

⁶ Link to the hearing: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/food-security-and-nutrition-as-keys-to-h/product-details/20220315CHE10009#:~:text=The%20Committee%20on%20Development%20held,EU%20development%20and%20humanitarian%20policies>.

⁷ Link to the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 website: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

⁸ Link to the Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021 website: <https://nutritionforgrowth.org/events/>

production. He is particularly interested in how we can secure the livelihoods of small-scale farmers, and especially women.

The aim of this hearing is to get recommendations on how EU development and humanitarian policies can contribute to global food security.

Moderator: **Beata Kempa**, MEP

- She emphasised that food security indicators point to the fact that SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) will not be reached by 2030, if we continue the current way.
- FAO estimates that the war in Ukraine could lead to a worldwide increase of 8-13 million people facing hunger, among already vulnerable groups (in addition to the over 800 million already suffering hunger).

3 Keynote speech: The right to food: A grand universal principle versus bleak reality?

H.E. Ambassador **Gabriel Ferrero**, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

The 'right to food' is the right for every person to have access to adequate and nutritious food at all times, or means for its procurement, including the right to choose according to their dietary preferences. Unfortunately, progress on SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) was already insufficient before the COVID-19 pandemic, and now it is even worse. The pandemic, recent conflicts and related rising costs of living are driving us further away from Zero Hunger, especially in centre/south Africa, and south Asia.

There is a clear mismatch between a collective ambition to end malnutrition, and its implementation – we need to find the core issue preventing success, but also drivers of change, such as ending rural poverty, going towards climate neutrality, conserving biodiversity and transforming food systems at the local, national and global level.

It has been demonstrated that investing in agriculture is the most impactful in reducing poverty. In Africa, investment in agriculture is 11 times more effective at reducing poverty than investment in any other sector. More precisely, investment into agriculture should focus on 1) empowering small scale farmers and family farming which produce 80 % of the food the world consumes. 2) providing decent work throughout the agri-food chain, especially in rural environment, where the food originates. 3) empowering women who often are at the centre of food production, while simultaneously being the most impacted by malnutrition.

We know that it is possible to produce more and better (environmentally and socially) at the same time. Agri-food systems can be part of the solution for achieving the SDGs, but for this we need to redesign policies and adopt new ones, such as:

- 1) supporting small scale and family farming, cooperatives, pastoralists
- 2) investing in territorial developments to mobilise the potential of territories by making governments and local actors work more closely together
- 3) linking the reinforcement of small scale/family farming and territories with the expansion of social protection systems (school canteens, food vouchers, public procurement)
- 4) transforming value chains and markets by scaling up environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards in agribusiness (this can be done in an inclusive and progressive way for small scale producers)
- 5) strengthening humanitarian aid and maximise its provision from local food systems
- 6) strengthening local governance of agri-food systems as promoted by the UNFSS 2021.

Those policies will need to be supported by accelerators, including

- 1) a different approach to food systems, in which we see how everything is interlinked
- 2) country-led and country driven policies
- 3) increased financing, including Sectoral budget support, and capitalising on multilateral funds. It is crucial that we mobilise 33 billion dollars a year which, according to various studies, is what is required to end hunger and transform food systems.

Mr Ferrero further emphasised the need to mobilise political energy on a global scale. We need coordinated action by the entire UN system and international financial institutions to use change agents. The global task force on food, energy and financial crisis response announced by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres after the UNFSS 2021 is the necessary framework. It will need leadership from the G7 and G20 to achieve the right political profile.

In addition, he stressed the need for global coordination to give a voice to the countries affected together with CFS readiness to serve as a platform to that end.

Finally, he called for addressing the urgent and immediate crisis, while taking into account sustainability and longer-term food security goals.

4 Part 1: Turning commitments from the Food Systems Summit and Nutrition for Growth Summit into action'

4.1 Presentations

Ms **Boitshepo Bibi Giyose** – Senior Advisor food and nutrition security at FAO, seconded to AUDA-NEPAD, African Union Development Agency: *"Transforming food systems and mainstreaming nutrition: perspectives from Africa"*

Recent events such as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have had devastating effects globally, and it is crucial that we focus on mitigating their impacts, but we also need help with the consequences of ongoing conflicts in Africa.

One outcome of the UNFSS 2021 is that AUDA-NEPAD developed a common position on sustainable food systems in Africa⁹. It focuses on:

- 1) context-specific approaches, as there is no one-size fits all solution
- 2) closing the production gaps, strengthening the different value chains
- 3) food sovereignty, going back to traditional and indigenous food systems that are key in safeguarding local food security
- 4) dietary diversification to reduce dependency on few staple-foods and improve nutrition
- 5) Raising consumer awareness to curb unhealthy diets
- 6) strengthening capacity building from the farm to the plate
- 7) ensuring accountability and good governance.

Ms. Giyose put forward some important elements in the path to Zero Hunger. First, to ensure sustainable capacity building along the food chain, as well as make sure that the technology and innovation that is introduced can be adapted to varied and specific contexts.

She also highlighted the importance of research for evidence-based policy making and well-informed programme design and implementation. This can support the development of food-based dietary

⁹ Link to The Africa Common Position on Food Systems:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/246156/AU%20Common%20Position%20on%20Food%20Systems%20-%20English%2011-2021.pdf>

guidelines, which are very useful. Finally, we should look into supporting areas in the Common African Position for food systems and linking that to the fact that this year the Africa Union has declared **2022 as the year of nutrition and food systems**. Cooperation between EU and AU will be crucial and needs to be translated into concrete actions.

In conclusion, we need to do “business *unusual*”.

Mr **Stefanos Fotiou**, FAO Director of the Office of Sustainable Development Goals, leading the Coordination Hub for the follow up of the UN Food Systems Summit: “What next after UN Food Systems Summit to deliver on SDG 2 – Zero Hunger”

The UNFSS 2021 successfully delivered 5 outcomes, which highlighted:

- 1) the political commitment from world leaders required to change the way we’re approaching the agri-food system development. We need to apply a systems-thinking approach that doesn’t only look at the productivity of agriculture or the price of the food, but also at the social and environmental externalities of agri-food systems.
- 2) the need for global food leadership supported by science and institutions, to bring about new knowledge on food systems. For example, we learned that the global food system generates about 10 trillion dollars every year in added value, but the unsustainable way that the system operates generates 6-12 trillion in hidden economic, environmental, and social costs. This means that all the added value is lost because of the unsustainable ways in which the systems are working.
- 3) the fact that more than 100 countries have submitted concrete pathways of their vision on how to transform food systems and accelerate the development of the 2030 agenda.
- 4) the need to put forward a very big system of support for individual countries on advancing agri-food systems transformation.
- 5) the UN’s commitment to act as one and establish a hub to support the follow up of the UNFSS 2021.
 - The hub will support national government and UN country teams to accelerate this transformative action, to maintain the inclusivity of the global ecosystem of diverse stakeholders, and to sustain a consistent, compelling, and contextualised narrative around food systems.
 - In terms of the needed assistance from the hub, countries are demanding support on leveraging finance. This should unlock existing opportunities; and facilitate connections with organisations and different stakeholders that can provide solutions for sustainable agri-food systems, together with guidance on how to monitor and evaluate progress on the agri-food system transformation.

Mr Fotiou stressed that real support can be provided by taking bold actions: “We do not need new goals or priorities. We need bold actions to achieve the goals we already have,” he asserted. In this respect, he further called for a major change in how the finance system is working, from a focus on economic growth to one on sustainable development. He concluded that now ‘it’s not the time for more plans, it’s time to roll up our sleeves and do the work’.

4.2 Q&A

4.3 Questions and comments

Frances Fitzgerald, MEP

Underlined that the war in Ukraine demonstrates the vulnerability of global food systems. What can urgently be done? How can European farmers be supported to fill the gaps in food supply left by the war?

Ms Fitzgerald also stressed that women make 50 % of agri-labour force in developing countries, yet face more food insecurity. Are there examples of best practice to empower them?

Eric Andrieu, MEP

In the 1980, we have put agriculture in the hands of the market, but this deregulation lasted for too long. He asked for a profound change in orientation. We need to check if the money is going to the right places, and re-orient it.

He also underlined that growth does not necessarily go hand in hand with development. We should rethink the indicators for development, outside of GDP. What is important is to feed humanity, and therefore we need to rethink our methods, for example we need to look at biofuels, and reorient the production for people and animals.

María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, MEP

Since the 1950s, food security has gotten worse. This is not a problem of food production, but of access. The issue here is human rights. . While there are arguments saying that small-scale farmers cannot feed the world, major problem arises from the fact that the monocrops put in place are used to feed cattle. This situation raises a few questions:

- How can food production and distribution on a more local and equitable level be achieved?
- How can we narrow the gender gap and address the situation of lack of financing and access to resources for women?

Caroline Roose, MEP

Regarding the follow up of the UNFSS 2021, Ms. Roose expressed her understanding that the summit monitoring mechanism will establish a consultative group consisting of priority groups such as young people, indigenous people and women in order to provide adequate monitoring of progress in the follow-up of the summit. She was however sceptical about this process given the alleged marginalisation of civil society and small producers during the summit, and the dominance of big food companies. Several NGOs refused to participate in the pre-summit in Rome and created an alternative forum to denounce the failure to take into account those directly affected by food insecurity. They criticised the governance of the summit as well as not sufficiently taking into account the right to food, nor agro-ecological approaches. Given this situation, Ms Roose wondered:

- Whether that criticism was taken into account in the follow up and monitoring of this forum and what the implications will be?
- How does the EC intend to implement the farm to fork strategy at an international level?

Miguel Urban Crespo, MEP

Mr Crespo stressed that Short and local circuits, which is what we tend to see in the documents of the EU institutions, do not work well with the EU trade agenda. For example, a case in point are according to him the EU-Mercosur trade negotiations.. He believed this was a neoliberal and agro-industrial approach to trade agreements, as they imply long supply chains, a situation which undermines food security. Mr. Urban Crespo further stressed that because access to adequate food is a human right, speculations on primary goods such as food and water, needs to be banned. These two aspects are contradictory: either you push for rights, or for what the market requires, and right now we are rather following a mercantile approach. Small farmers are being side-lined. Therefore, he considered that EU policies and trade agreements are either permitting or encouraging this situation.

Instead, the EU should support small-scale agriculture based on ecology with short circuits, and a clear approach to rights and gender.

Marlene Mortler, MEP

Ms Mortler believes that we must think critically about why we are establishing policies that restrain farming in Europe while encouraging it in third world countries. She further wondered why, despite this push, there isn't more support for agriculture in developing countries and for women more specifically.

Moreover, she noted that there is an increasing monopolisation of land in the hands of a few big holders and companies.

The credibility of the UN must be addressed, because all the solutions envisaged have not led to any real outcome.

She furthermore agreed with the previous comment on speculation. Because of the war in Ukraine, China has for the first time imported large amounts of cereals from the world market, which is now basic ground for speculation.

Maria Noichl, MEP

She stressed that the right to food entails many related rights, such as the right to water, to seeds (including GM ones), the right to breed animals, and to access the land.

We cannot vote for the privatisation of any of these if our overall aim is the right to food. The EU lacks compliance with in this regard.

4.4 Answers

Mr Gabriel Ferrero reminded that the right to food is indeed multidimensional.

He stressed that the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and its knock-on effect on the world should be addressed urgently. He also underlined the need to ensure that the upcoming harvest is as robust as possible by supporting local actors who can contribute to ensuring greater resilience (e.g. small-scale farmers, SMEs, Cooperatives, etc.). We need to look at the longer-term solutions.

He further highlighted the existing evidence of the positive impact of empowering women for human development. Studies have all pointed in that direction. The Committee on World Food Security¹⁰ is negotiating voluntary worldwide guidelines for the empowerment of women in food systems. It is crucial that in October a worldwide consensus is reached on this.

Moreover, he believed that the current metrics give rise to a distortion in the way we measure productivity. This conceals a great deal of costs. We need to discuss productivity in terms of nutrition, as well as the efficient use of natural resources. In this way, we will have a real measure of sustainability and compliance with specific rights.

Moreover, he believed that the Ukraine crisis provides an opportunity to change how we address food, seeing it as a right and not just as something to be traded.

Ms. Boitshepo Bibi Giyose, AUDA-NEPAD Since women are the largest producers in Africa (while also being the most malnourished), technology and innovation must be well suited for their needs. She observed that when crops gain economic value, women are pushed out of the system to farm and sell them. They are consequently pushed away from the economic resources that they are capable of producing. So women need to be empowered with the right micro-financing. We must also pay attention to indigenous and marginalised populations. For example, we can look at agro-ecological production methods, when 'commercial' methods are not available or suited for certain contexts. Covid has shown that people can provide for themselves and their families with kitchen or home gardens for example.

¹⁰ Link to the Committee on World Food Security website: <https://www.fao.org/cfs/en/>

We are not lacking policies, guidelines, strategies, but we are lacking the transformation of these into real pragmatic actions.

She recalled that during the food crisis in 2007/2008, some poorest countries that were growing food in their local food systems did not feel the effects of the price speculation on staples and their lack in the market. This shows that we need to move beyond the paradigm of a few basic staples and towards varied and locally adapted productions for optimal nutrition.

On the issue of trade, we need to assess how we promote fair trade. She hoped for more consciousness about how we can get equity in North-South trade and also to ease protectionism which soared during Covid when borders were closed.

In terms of food safety, we need research on food safety, and make sure that technology development is collaborative and transparent between the North and the South.

Fotiou Stefanos, FAO

Regarding best practices on gender, he stressed FAO has a lot of research on this, especially the paper 'best practices for integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in climate-smart agricultural programmes'.

He emphasised that we need to address the low rate of regulation in the agri-food systems due to the deregulation process that started in the finance sector in the 80s. While markets need to work in order to promote sustainable development, leaving things to the market has its limitations.

He agreed that there is an issue with the increasing monopolisation of land. It is up to the policy makers to decide that legislations need to be reviewed to reflect sustainable development and not only economic growth.

A very important policy recommendation is that we need to implement the principle of subsidiarity when talking about small scale farmers. It is a recurring theme when reviewing regulatory frameworks. In successful examples, it can be seen that social and political issues should be addressed at the closest levels. While national policies and even global strategies could inspire some legislations, we need to go down to the local levels.

Regarding the engagement of stakeholders in the post-food systems summit, he mentioned that the UN food systems coordination hub will establish a stakeholder engagement and networking advisory group. The aim is to make it very inclusive to connect and advise, but also to find opportunities for local stakeholders to engage with the follow up of the UNFSS 2021, for the implementation of national pathways. It is important to do so to provide a platform for local stakeholders (such as producers).

Mr Leonard Mizzi, EC (DG INTPA)

He mentioned that given previous experience with global food crises, it is known what works and what does not.

The EC continues working to build a robust and resilient food system for the medium and long term. DG INTPA collaborates closely with ECHO to address the humanitarian-development-peace dimension, to calm the markets and eventually to avoid food rioting. He emphasised that trade is not a culprit but is part of the solution. Import and export bans/restrictions need to be avoided.

The EC is supporting around 50 countries in terms of national pathways for sustainable food systems and nutrition but cannot possibly solve all the problems put forward. Therefore, the EC plans to promote a model that has strong credentials in terms of rights, social standards settings, deforestation-free value chains, biodiversity and climate change.

He also mentioned the need to discuss food loss and waste, as well as healthy diets, school meal, aquatic resources, etc. These are topics that will create clear coalitions with the national pathways in a multi-stakeholder approach.

In addition, there has been very severe underinvestment in agri-food systems in the African continent, which needs to be addressed at a regional level.

In order to prioritise agri-food systems within the broader policy landscape, there is a need for holistic, systemic, interdepartmental solutions.

Given that investment institutions are risk-averse and rarely seek to invest in agriculture, the EC is trying to maximise the use of EU funds.

5 Part 2: 'What works in practice? Reality of food and nutrition security in different countries'

5.1 Presentations

Ms Khady Fall Tall, Présidente régionale de l'Association des Femmes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (AFAO): *"Improving the economic status of women farmers"*

There should be a focus on the situation of women in rural areas and their food security. 52 % of the population in Africa are women, which produce 57 % of agricultural products.

The AFAO works to improve the economic status of women, to help them become independent. They want to change the nature of the work that women are doing in Africa, which currently involve long hours (12-18 h/day) and very difficult working conditions. They offer training centres to improve women's skills in the processing of products to ensure food security and help them escape poverty. We need to put in place a strategic committee on women when it comes to development in Africa.

AFAO needs funding to improve programmes at an operational level. They want to see human capital being prioritised so that in the future they can educate children to put food at the centre of development work.

Poverty and illiteracy are key factors hindering many efforts made. Any activities not taking these into account will not see benefits. We also need to take into account maternal and infant health in nutrition programming. Furthermore, desertification affects the whole agricultural value chain. Availability of water is also an issue. In cooperation with ECOWAS, AFAO is implementing projects such as social work, improvement of the availability of water, humanitarian interventions, institutional healthcare and cooperatives on food security. Food security needs to be addressed on a regional level.

We need involvement of civil society and NGOs. Young people do not see the impacts of international assistance.. Need more visibility of EU action with focus on food security.

Mr Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of ROPPA, West African Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers: *"Challenges for small-scale farmers, agroecology approaches and their contribution to food security"*

In West Africa the rural population is the majority, and most people work in family based small-scale farms.

Not a lot of people had issues feeding themselves until independence, which saw the introduction of industrial chemical fertilisers. The price of these imported fertilisers continued to increase while the price of exported agricultural goods continued to decrease. Furthermore, many imported products enter into competition with local goods. This led to rising poverty levels in local communities. Imports might be essential, but that's mainly for the 20 % of people that live in cities. However, farmers often lack the means of buying these products. The only way for them of accessing food is to produce it themselves.

We need to go back to models that have fed people in the past. There are many things that work. If a family has the occasion to grow their own crops, they can feed themselves, but also produce their own fertilisers. Farmers can train other farmers. However, families often do not simply even have the means to transport manure to fertilise their fields, so we need to stop talking about the right to food, but instead talk about the right to *produce* your own food. This is the policy that works. Why do we not support these simple methods?

If we want to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, improve health, and increase economic growth in local food systems, we should allow the planet to recover and fight climate change by supporting an agro-ecological transition. Even though West Africa has consistent agricultural policies at national and also African Union level, these are not applied.

Mr **Paul Sommers**, food security advisor, with experience in livelihood programmes in 55 countries worldwide; contracted for the DEVE Workshop related to the hearing, *"The right to food in fragile contexts – effective practices and policy"*

The most effective approach to improving food security, especially in fragile environments, is by starting from the reality on the ground – and looking at the daily challenges of securing food hence through a bottom-up approach.

Subsistence farming households, mostly managed by women, have set up resilient, biodiverse, polycultural food systems for their daily survival. Genuine and meaningful support begins from appreciating and understanding what is already being done in the household, and from there, filling gaps by listening to their needs.

When you ask women what changes they would like to make to their existing system to make it even more resilient, inevitably, they ask for guidance on small but significant, incremental changes to their subsistence system. For instance identifying ways to extend the growing season, diversifying food sources by adding crops that will grow well locally and improving the productivity of their crops through local resources. This is especially important for greater resilience to volatile food prices and lack of access to markets.

Farmers will show us what is important to them if we are willing to listen. There is no one size fits all approach. Our job is to embrace a bottom-up approach, identifying gaps and finding local solutions to close those gaps.

5.2 Q&A

5.3 Questions and comments

Marlene Mortler, MEP

We need an understanding of local measures and situations, and Mr. Sommers did a great job at explaining what is possible. We also need long-term and flexible funding. Conflicts are the main cause of world hunger, the war in Ukraine being the most recent example. Peace is very closely correlated to food security.

Asked Ms Fall Tall (AFAO) whether there is any cooperation with women's organisations in Europe to exchange information and practices? And how does the centre for skills learning work in practice?

Ms Mortler was also wondering about issues related to livestock breeding in the context of agro-ecological systems, what about livestock breeding.

Karsten Lucke, MEP

Mr Karsten stated that we need to have debates about the issues of land rights, seeds and biodiversity and also need to start acting to tackle those issues.

He asked Ms. Giyose about what policies work in practice, and also welcomed Mr. Coulibaly's point about the lack of action behind the policies. Mr Karsten wanted to know what can the EU do to support small

scale farmers to improve their situations, and whether there are any measures that can be taken to ensure that yields of farmers can be higher and longer lasting?

Barry Andrews, MEP

Mr Andrews agreed with the need to place special focus on the reality on the ground, but also emphasised the importance of addressing the highest political levels. We need to put development aspects much higher on the political agenda.

He also spoke about the question of transformative change vs incremental change, and wondered whether the speakers thought that the EU could invest more in food systems.

He further pointed to the need to provide access to market and market insight but also investment. The EIB for example invests in big infrastructure projects, but is not very good at smaller projects that create markets for small-holders.

Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, MEP

She asked what happened to the school canteens, why do they no longer exist? (AFAO mentioned the closure of school canteens)

Wondered if we forcing farmers to accept products that we import?

Asked how do the events in Ukraine impact the small holders in Africa, and women?

Monica Gonzales, MEP

She highlighted that women are the key to food security. How can the EU integrate the gender issue in regional macro-financing instruments?

Moreover, how can we give women more importance in plans and programmes implemented by the EU in bilateral cooperation?

She also asked about possibilities to move away from pesticides and chemicals.

5.4 Answers

Khady Fall Tall, AFAO

Responded that it is not yet possible to reciprocate cooperation between Northern and Southern women organisations. There are arrangements so that women can stay in the skills centre and boarding during the training (they are fully looked after). The canteens were stopped by the structural programmes and donors. We need to study the contribution made by school canteen to bring them back on the agenda.

Regarding the Ukraine crisis, believed that women in Africa are going to be the first to be affected. They are at the beginning and the end of the food cycle. When there are gaps in the chain, it is the women that are going to fill them in.

We need a closer look at what happens on the ground and provide more finance to women organisations, including for the fight against illiteracy. It has been proven that educated children have a higher life expectation.

Ibrahima Coulibaly, RPPOA

For some time now, people have been aware that the market is not meeting their requirements anymore. Prices have gone up and are still rising (food, fertilizer, energy, etc.)

Indeed, we need to listen to the local communities. People have the knowledge and skills, but do not have the equipment, nor the money to buy what they need (e.g. they know how to use biomass to create

fertiliser, but do not have wheel barrels to transport it). We have all the solutions and answers, but not the ways to implement them.

Having livestock, water, and basic tools can make a huge difference for small farmers, and these are not very expensive investments for donors. We should target those specific requirements and needs.

Structural funds must be used in the most appropriate ways, investing in small-scale agriculture. Young people in Western Africa join armed groups rather than become farmers because they get an income, not because of an ideology. Need to know exactly the impact of aid and where the money goes. Need to build in systems to ensure that people can get the money they need. Young farmers need a bit of capital to get started with their farms or to bounce back from crisis. We need micro-credits.

There is a very large gap between the needs in cities, and in rural areas. In many cases, none of the programme budget and investments reach the villages. It does not go to the right place, so we need proper follow up mechanisms. We also need to engage with communities to tell us whether there is an impact.

6 Concluding remarks

Concluding the hearing, **Beata Kempa, MEP** reminded that while there is food waste and obesity, at the same time, developing countries do not even have access to certain products. This shows a lack of coordination.

She further stressed that agriculture in developing countries requires more investment. We should shorten the supply chains. What women do in Africa is essential. We talked about lack of equipment, access to water, or education on nutrition.

The EU is the largest donor, and needs to improve contact with NGOs on the ground that do impactful work. We need to establish cooperation with these organisations and support them financially.

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