

Food Systems Summit +2



Current knowledge on what's needed to achieve food security and sustainable food systems could have brought us further than where we are now. Without structural changes, however, progress is bound to remain stalled.

The 24 July 2023 marks the beginning of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) +2 Stocktaking Moment in Rome. This is the first of a series of two-year meetings that the UN Secretary-General has committed to convene to review progress in implementing the outcomes of the UNFSS held in 2021 and its contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Apart from monitoring progress, this process is a valuable opportunity to map hindrances, to set new priorities and to revisit strategies. Climate change, crises and conflicts have not been on our side lately, but the fact that many countries are moving backwards in achieving food security and sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems is a clear sign that something deeper must change in the way we've been tackling these issues.

Studies exploring food systems transformation pathways have shown what concrete actions should be taken for some targets to be met, as well as what impacts should be expected if no action is taken. But neither exploratory nor target-seeking analyses will get us far unless complemented by studies on the determinants of behavioural change, the hurdles of policy implementation or the difficulties of technological adoption. It is also

crucial that research examines how these factors affect the feasibility of proposed solutions and transformation pathways; while optimal and controlled scenarios are key for measuring potentials, real-world decisions are usually taken under dynamic and erratic circumstances.

The very way transformation goals are set out may pose a challenge to the transformative process. Although their level of ambition is consistent with the urgency of the matter, and nothing other than 'zero hunger' is acceptable from a human justice perspective, perhaps a roadmap with intermediate targets and gradual steps would have offered better guidance to policymakers and avoided the feeling of discouragement that often arises when thinking about how big a task it is to transform the world's food system. Besides, while it is commendable that the UN Sustainable Development Goals – key to the UNFSS agenda for food systems transformation – involve a set of universal targets and indicators adaptable to specific contexts, some of them have inconsistent formulations and their operationalization requires data and other resources that are often unavailable.

Most importantly, change will hardly happen or produce desired outcomes if structural issues are not addressed, including those inherent to food systems and to other sectors alike. Examples span international food trade rules that are disadvantageous to poor countries, financial debt pressure, undemocratic decision-making processes, capital concentration and power asymmetry along food supply chains. Although innovations are to be cherished as entry points for change,

particularly in the case of rigid systems, they usually circumvent structural lock-ins rather than confront them. At the same time, successful stories of food systems transformation offer inspiration and hope but should not divert attention away from more fundamental changes – and these stories are unlikely to become the norm if the need to circumvent systemic problems persists. Distorted pricing mechanisms, faulty institutional structures, poor governance and marginalization tend to compromise people's trust and create a feeling of disempowerment and alienation that disincentivize efforts towards change.

The UNFSS has set in motion various mechanisms to deal with the points outlined above. The Scientific Advisory Committee of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub has been tasked with enhancing food systems knowledge and evidence base, as well as identifying priority research areas and gathering sensitive data in different countries. Member State Dialogues are being promoted to aid the design of national pathways to sustainable food systems. Through the Stakeholder Engagement and Networking Advisory Group, youth, Indigenous peoples, producers, women and the private sector should have their voices heard. Finally, a new Food Finance Architecture has been proposed to reshape public support and incentives, to integrate risks into financial decision-making, to mobilize funds for sustainable business, and so on. Hopefully the UNFSS +2 will solidify each of these mechanisms and our focus on the roots of the problem.

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