

FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs)

Washington, DC, 10 December 2019

CO-ORGANIZED BY FAO North America, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN USA)
and Duke University's World Food Policy Center

SUMMARY REPORT*

Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Proposals	4
Proposal 1: Apply systems thinking to better understand unintended consequences and synergies & tradeoffs	4
Proposal 2: Be inclusive, set clear boundaries and get stakeholders to agree on which objectives food systems should be transformed towards.....	4
Proposal 3: Put people's access to Sustainable Healthy Diets at the center	4
Proposal 4: Translate unprecedented international high level political momentum into action	5
Proposal 5: Promote pro-poor, gender-equal Inclusive Governance	5
Proposal 6: Build Gender Equality and Women's Voice	5
Proposal 7: Build strong and equitable asset bases for Resilience.....	6
Proposal 8: Use financial incentives to increase the availability, accessibility, and affordability of foods contributing to a healthy diet.....	6
Proposal 9: Use financial disincentives to reduce production and consumption of unhealthy foods.....	6
Proposal 10: Regulate marketing of breastmilk substitutes to caregivers and unhealthy food to children	6
Proposal 11: Promote healthy food environments in and around schools	7
Proposal 12: Empower farmers economically and protect rural livelihoods	7
Proposal 13: Address land consolidation and increase land access to beginning farmers... ..	7
Proposal 14: Enforce anti-trust rules for competitive agricultural markets.....	7
Proposal 15: Develop guidelines to help countries integrate relevant policies and strategies into national action plans and programs.....	8
Proposal 16: Understand the populations' diet trends, including the costs, and availability of micronutrient-rich foods, in different geographic location contexts.	8

Proposal 17: Support private sector engagement in the transformation of systems to deliver nutritious foods..... 8

Proposal 18: Provide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidance to ensure the national programs are reaching the intended beneficiaries..... 9

Proposal 19: Biofortification and fortification should be mainstreamed in policies and programs in many more countries..... 9

Proposal 20: Create Wealth-Building Opportunities for Communities of Color within the Food System..... 9

Proposal 21: Institutions must change the way they are doing food systems work.....10

Proposal 22: Center racial inequities and the needs of communities of color when making policies.....10

Proposal 23: Better disaggregate our current data by race and ethnicity, especially at the city level.....11

Proposal 24: Improve food access and equity by addressing transportation barriers and expanding access and awareness of existing healthy food retail stores11

Proposal 25: Create wealth-building opportunities for small food entrepreneurs to enter into different markets and support high-quality career pathways in the food system11

Proposal 26: Promote nutrition education alongside healthy food access to ensure that populations take advantage of existing healthy food12

*The format of FSDs Summary Reports is under development. This report may be subject to change

Executive Summary

On 10 December 2019 a Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event took place in Washington DC, USA, co-organized by FAO North America, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN USA) and Duke University's World Food Policy Center. Over 100 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems, ranging from local food policy practitioners to experts from international organizations and the US Government.

Tables were asked to present one or more proposals for action to address a specific area of food systems, with a focus on Washington, DC, the United States, as well as global implications.

The discussion topics for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas:

- Food Systems Thinking
- Child Obesity Reduction
- Tackling Micronutrient Deficiencies through Biofortification
- Race, Inequality and Food Systems
- Gender, Nutrition and Food Systems
- Key Challenges for Family Farmers
- City Food Systems and DC Food Policy

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to that topic. We thank representatives of the following organizations for also facilitating table discussions: Harvest Plus, CARE International, the DC Office of Planning, the National Family Farm Coalition, and the Bread for the World Institute.

The following is a summary of the tables' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

Proposals

Food Systems Thinking

Proposal 1: Apply systems thinking to better understand unintended consequences and synergies & tradeoffs

Greater specialization has led to siloes between sectors, in academia and in policy. Actions without systems thinking frequently lead to unintended consequences. Systems thinking, multisectoral and interdisciplinary approaches allow analyzing interdependencies, as well as synergies and tradeoffs across the three dimensions of sustainability: Social, Environmental and Economic. Current debates on food system transformation and [Sustainable Healthy Diets](#) (meaning healthy diets that are also economically, environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable) emphasize the need for system thinking. Organizations and governments are encouraged to explore food systems approaches and create coordination mechanisms to increase policy coherence.

Proposal 2: Be inclusive, set clear boundaries and get stakeholders to agree on which objectives food systems should be transformed towards

Food systems actors have different expectations in terms of outcomes. High in the agenda are often outcomes like productivity, income and jobs. For governments, getting tax revenues is also a priority. Transformation will need collective action and partnerships, which require consensus between key food system stakeholders, including the often forgotten “[missing middle](#)” of small and medium enterprises. Any discussion on food systems therefore needs to identify goal (“why”) and what challenges should be solved. The food systems transformation pathways (“how”) will follow the identified problems and objectives. A fragmentation of work on food systems and duplication of efforts should be avoided.

Proposal 3: Put people’s access to Sustainable Healthy Diets at the center

Currently, over 2 billion people do not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food, which is about 26.4 percent of the world population. The lack of regular access to nutritious and sufficient food in their diet puts this people at greater risk of malnutrition and poor health. Transforming food systems towards [Sustainable Healthy Diets](#) means to enable *dietary patterns that promote all dimensions of individuals’ health and wellbeing; have low environmental pressure and impact; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and are culturally acceptable*. Making food systems deliver Sustainable Healthy Diets will require going beyond assessing the nutrition status of the population or the productivity of the supply. We need a better understanding of what people eat, what is over or under represented in their diets and

why and how food systems contribute to dietary patterns in terms of challenges but also potential solutions. Policy coherence needs to be backed-up by a coherent financial landscape that can leverage from public, private and blended finance.

Proposal 4: Translate unprecedented international high level political momentum into action

We are half way through the [UN Decade of Action on Nutrition](#) to achieve the global nutrition and diet-related NCD targets by 2025. Two world events will be the highlights of the coming two years: the 2020 Nutrition for Growth Summit and the 2021 World Summit on Food Systems. For FAO, 2020-2021 is a biennium for promoting sustainable healthy diets and preventing all forms of malnutrition.

Now is the time – perhaps the only one – to translate this unprecedented high-level political momentum into actions to transform how we do things not just for today but also the future. By using the window of the next two years to its full potential, we can achieve much more by 2025 and contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Gender, Nutrition and Food Systems

Proposal 5: Promote pro-poor, gender-equal Inclusive Governance

Promote pro-poor, gender-equal institutions protecting and promoting food and nutrition security. This would require building the capacity of communities – and women -- to engage with all actors throughout the food system to enhance social accountability for nutrition. Concrete policy change might be to (1) include any ministries focused on gender or women in multi-sectoral food systems planning/policy; (2) ensure participation of women-led organizations in policy decision-making processes; (3) require gender disaggregated reporting through monitoring instruments & bodies.

Proposal 6: Build Gender Equality and Women's Voice

Transform underlying gender inequalities and social norms to build women's agency and autonomy as caregivers, producers and market actors; form more equitable relationships at the household levels (including addressing the disproportionate labor burden & decision-making); and create an enabling environment and equitable institutions for ensuring women's rights as human rights. Concrete policy change might be to (1) as donors & the private sector, require integration of gender/women's empowerment (including engagement of men/boys) in donor-funded programs & with private sector suppliers to ensure gender dynamics are addressed at

household, community, and national levels; (2) address gender inequality in access to resources (like land, finance, extension services – including by ensuring adequate #s of female extension/veterinary agents); (3) increase investment in extension/veterinary services & train agents in nutrition and gender so they can address the role of ag diversification for resilience, dietary diversity, and equitable HH feeding/consuming of more nutritious diets.

Proposal 7: Build strong and equitable asset bases for Resilience

Build strong and equitable asset bases that can withstand shocks and long-term stressors, including access to market, price, and climate information; insurance to deal with occurring loss and damage; and household savings and formal safety nets as recovery mechanisms. Concrete policy change might be to (1) ensure equitable access to safety nets that promote/enable consumption of healthy diets; (2) scale up savings-led financial services.

Addressing global child overweight and obesity

Proposal 8: Use financial incentives to increase the availability, accessibility, and affordability of foods contributing to a healthy diet

The food industry is driven by profits, which are often at odds with public health. Incentivizing the right foods will facilitate the development of palatable and convenient foods that contribute to a healthy diet and the reformulation of unhealthy foods for improved nutrition.

Proposal 9: Use financial disincentives to reduce production and consumption of unhealthy foods

Unhealthy foods are typically cheap to produce and easy to get children hooked on. Taxes and other policies can discourage production and consumption of unhealthy foods and generate income that can be used to improve public health and nutrition.

Proposal 10: Regulate marketing of breastmilk substitutes to caregivers and unhealthy food to children

Caregivers can be persuaded that formula feeding is nutritionally ideal and convenient. And marketing can make unhealthy products like sugar-sweetened cereals and beverages and fast food highly desirable to children. Regulations should be put in place to prevent such marketing to children and caregivers.

Proposal 11: Promote healthy food environments in and around schools

Children's food environment at and nearby schools, largely determines their diets. Limiting the existence of fast food and vending machines on or near campus will reduce consumption of junk food during and after the school day. School lunches if provided or for purchase, should be designed to be nutrient rich and limited in highly processed foods.

Key Challenges for Family Farmers

Proposal 12: Empower farmers economically and protect rural livelihoods

Faced with chronic low prices below family farmers' cost of production, federal policy should i) establish scale-appropriate price supports covering farmers' basic costs of production (equivalent to a farmers' minimum wage) and provide parity prices for family-scale farmers that implement strong conservation practices, ii) implement mandatory national supply management programs that limit overproduction and agricultural dumping on foreign markets, iii) institute limitations on corporate access to federal price support programs.

Proposal 13: Address land consolidation and increase land access to beginning farmers

With unprecedented levels of land concentration in the US, high land prices presenting a barrier to entry for beginning farmers, and significant loss of land controlled by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities over the past fifty years, federal policy is needed to limit corporate investment and ownership of agricultural land. This federal action must be coupled with provision of federal support for land access by beginning and BIPOC farmers through the creation of national land banks, targeted expansion of USDA grant and loan guarantee programs, and addressing long-standing evidence of discrimination in USDA's agricultural lending practices through the implementation of BIPOC community-based oversight role of local USDA offices.

Proposal 14: Enforce anti-trust rules for competitive agricultural markets

Corporate concentration in the agricultural sector has reached its highest levels in a century, stifling healthy market competition and innovation, depressing prices for farmers, limiting farmer access to markets and value-chains, and negatively impacting consumer choice. Strong and implementable anti-trust action is needed to freeze corporate mega-mergers and break up corporate control of agricultural/food inputs, processing, marketing, and retail sectors.

Why is Progress in Reducing Micronutrient Deficiencies Slow?

How can a food systems approach accelerate the progress?

Proposal 15: Develop guidelines to help countries integrate relevant policies and strategies into national action plans and programs.

Governments are well aware of the urgency of the malnutrition issues, and related causes and impacts. Providing a policy base for micronutrient deficiencies, and guidelines on how to integrate it with the national nutrition and agriculture action plans are vital. Multilateral organizations and international and national research institutes are well placed to transfer expertise, knowledge, and lessons learned to national governments so that national governments can develop and implement policies and programs to reduce micronutrient deficiencies.

Proposal 16: Understand the populations' diet trends, including the costs, and availability of micronutrient-rich foods, in different geographic location contexts.

Environment, culture, and political-economy significantly affect the accessibility and availability of micronutrient-rich foods in different country/geographic location (urban vs. rural) contexts. The solutions should be tailored to these contexts, and this requires a solid understanding of the dietary trends. It is therefore important to have high quality, nationally representative and recent data on diets (ref). Thought leaders and key stakeholders (e.g., multilateral institutes) should ensure that the current emphasis on filling in the data gaps and standardization of metrics remain a high priority in the global food security and nutrition agenda. Better data on diets will enable governments and the private sector to identify critical issues, strategies, and actions to improve diets to reduce micronutrient deficiencies.

Proposal 17: Support private sector engagement in the transformation of systems to deliver nutritious foods.

Delivering nutritious foods to all and promoting scalable nutrition interventions integrated into the food systems require commitment from all stakeholders, in particular, the private sector. The private sector can play a pivotal role in the introduction and delivery of nutritious foods. Consumer demand for nutritious foods should be catalyzed with awareness and education campaigns on healthy diets, while the private sector should be catalyzed to meet this demand, by providing them with technical assistance and innovative financial mechanisms. Guidance should be made available on why their engagement matters, how they can get engaged, and how they could mainstream nutritious foods in their product lines, while also providing them with evidence on the profitability of nutritious products. Research and multilateral institutions, governments/local implementation authorities can play a pivotal role in guiding and catalyzing the private sector in this regard.

Proposal 18: Provide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidance to ensure the national programs are reaching the intended beneficiaries.

Across countries and programs, there are significant variations in the quality, availability, and types of indicators, methods, metrics and tools used for measuring the progress of programs that have a bearing on micronutrient deficiency outcomes. Guidance for the development of M&E systems and investments in capacity development should be provided to those countries that integrate micronutrient deficiency reduction – focused programs in their national action plans. Public sector commitment is needed for sustainable and robust M&E systems and capacity. With reliable, high-quality M&E data, program progress, coverage and efficiency in reaching the target beneficiaries can be assessed and improved.

Proposal 19: Biofortification and fortification should be mainstreamed in policies and programs in many more countries.

Fortification (e.g., iodization of salt, the addition of folate to breakfast cereals) is a medium-term solution for improving micro-nutrient intakes and has been associated with several positive health outcomes. Fortification increases the micronutrient content of food products at the processing stage. Biofortification is a short to medium-term solution that increases the micronutrient content of commonly consumed staple crops at the production stage through conventional breeding and agronomic practices. Biofortification is found to increase the micronutrient intake, reduce/reverse the micronutrient deficiencies, and improve health outcomes. Both of these interventions are low hanging fruits that require minimum behavior change, are scalable, and cost-effective. They are also equitable since they target food vehicles that are consumed by all members of a household, regardless of age or gender – (unlike other micronutrient-dense foods (such as animal source foods which tend to be allocated to male members of a household).

Race, Inequality, and Food Systems

Proposal 20: Create Wealth-Building Opportunities for Communities of Color within the Food System.

This can be achieved by a) increasing the availability of capital and financing tools for entrepreneurs of color (domestically and internationally), and b) building community ownership of food systems solutions. For instance, build a cooperative grocery store rather than having a large chain move into a community for domestic contexts. This creates ownership, which restores power to communities of color.

Proposal 21: Institutions must change the way they are doing food systems work

For this to happen, we need to 1) Move from charitable models to justice-oriented models. In other words, shift away from continuing to invest in programs “for” people of color to a model that addresses the root causes of hunger (namely structural racism). This empowers people of color to own, design, and drive initiatives that work for them and their communities. 2) Ensure community accountability. Non-profit boards in communities are responsive to the local community they are serving and therefore should be racially representative of the community they are serving. This creates shared power for people of color in the decision-making processes of how they are being served. 3) Position yourself to create power for communities of color (individually and organizationally). In the daily decisions you make working within your institution, think about ways to use your power to create power for people of color. How can you include staff of color in decisions and leadership opportunities, and even advocate for a more racially equitable workplace environment? 4) Rethink how institutions can engage in projects that are community-led and institution-supported. Currently, many institutions lead projects and initiatives and bring the community along. Instead, institutions should voluntarily lift up the leadership of community members of color and step back as a “support” role to help with research, data collection, or other things that the community needs. 5) Encourage funders to start funding the efforts of community (or countries) of color directly. Currently, communities of color, both domestically and internationally are passed up for grants. The roundtable discussion highlighted how predominantly white institutions are actively seeking funding, and not making room for efforts initiated by communities of color in the U.S. or abroad to receive support. The international development world must consider how to change the power dynamics they operate within countries of color. How can international organizations, as well as domestic ones, better empower the communities of color they work with to “lead” the work, have “ownership” over the work, and receive more of the funding directly?

Proposal 22: Center racial inequities and the needs of communities of color when making policies.

This should take place domestically and internationally. Racial inequities that need to be considered *before* a policy is made or passed include the historical trauma of racism and the four types of racism that any particular community or country of color has faced and is currently experiencing. The Racial Equity and Nutrition Report, authored and published by Bread for the World Institute, was referenced as a good example for how policymakers can start applying a racial equity into policy. The report focuses on nutrition policy but provides a methodology to help people and organizations apply a racial equity lens to policy outside of the nutrition field.

Policy recommendations include a) Provide monthly food benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) based on household assets instead of solely income, to account for the widened racial wealth divide among low-income households, b) ensure that people of color are equitably engaged in designing, implementing, and evaluating all policies and programs to address food insecurity, c) ensure that people of color are equitably represented as program implementers, d) ensure that children of color are no longer being racially targeted by

advertising of unhealthy junk foods to kids, and e) for more recommendations on how racial equity can be applied to key federal nutrition policies in the United States, please read the [Racial Equity and Nutrition Report](#).¹

Proposal 23: Better disaggregate our current data by race and ethnicity, especially at the city level.

In addition to the data gaps identified in the Racial Equity and Nutrition report on pages 27, 43, and 52, the roundtable discussion highlighted other data gaps in the food system, relative to racial equity:

- a) Collect and understand food insecurity data at the local level by race and ethnicity. A food systems summary dashboard for better decision-making at the country level will be launched – could this include a disaggregation by race and ethnicity?
- b) Collect data on nutrition in the prison system, disaggregated by race. Currently, this data is non-existent. People of color in the U.S. are racially targeted and over-incarcerated in the criminal justice system. We also know that people who are incarcerated receive poor nutrition and this issue area is underreported. To apply a racial equity lens in food system policy, we must also understand food insecurity and food production in the prison and jail systems.

City Food Systems – The Washington DC Experience

The following recommendations are based on the [2020 DC Food Policy Priorities](#) and challenges identified by participants in the FSD small group discussions.

Proposal 24: Improve food access and equity by addressing transportation barriers and expanding access and awareness of existing healthy food retail stores

This can be done by a) creating an investment fund to invest in locally-owned food businesses serving neighborhoods with low access to healthy food; b) promoting programs that explore how nutritious food can improve health; and c) increasing awareness of new grocery options.

Proposal 25: Create wealth-building opportunities for small food entrepreneurs to enter into different markets and support high-quality career pathways in the food system

¹ Gamblin, Marlysa. Bread for the World Institute. <https://www.paperturn-view.com/us/bread-for-the-world/applying-racial-equity-to-u-s-federal-nutrition-assistance-programs?pid=NTg58712&v=3>

This can be achieved by a) identifying strategies to increase affordable commercial kitchen space, cold storage, storefronts, and retail opportunities for small food entrepreneurs; b) deploying innovative strategies for food businesses to support high-quality food jobs and careers; and c) identifying municipal regulations and licensing that present challenges for small food businesses.

Proposal 26: Promote nutrition education alongside healthy food access to ensure that populations take advantage of existing healthy food

This can be achieved by a) analyzing the gaps and opportunities for expanding access to nutrition and food system education in cities; b) enhancing collaboration among nutrition educators via summits and other coordination events; and c) increasing connections between the healthcare sector and nutrition and food system education.