Action Track Discussion Starter

Action Track 2 – Shift to healthy and sustainable consumption patterns

1. The problem to be tackled: Unhealthy diets have become a primary source of poor health and environmental degradation around the world, with glaring disparities between rich and poor.

Poor diets have become the leading global health risk and every year accounts for 11 million premature deaths and the loss of 255 million disability-adjusted life-years globally.[1,2] A shocking 690 million people are chronically hungry, while one third of what we produce is never eaten. Our diets have also become the leading contributor to global environmental degradation, affecting land, water, biodiversity, our climate and our air quality. However, fixing food is a unique and powerful opportunity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and involving people around the globe in solving some of our greatest challenges.

While hunger is once again on the rise and undernutrition persists, diet-related health conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer are also increasing rapidly.[3,4] More communities face a double burden of malnutrition, where both undernutrition (stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies) and overweight/obesity are prevalent with more than half of the world's population struggling with hunger and malnutrition.[5] One reason for this is that, in recent decades, food systems have tended to provide more quantity but less quality food.[6] Greater availability of cheap calories has not been accompanied by better availability of a diversity of nutritious foods. In addition, in today's economies, healthy diets can cost, on average, five times more than diets that simply provide enough calories. Current food policies, food industry practices and shifting consumer preferences are driving overconsumption and dramatic growth in consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages.[7,8,9,10] Dietary risk factors include diets that are low in fibers, fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds, milk, seafood, calcium, and healthy fats and/or high in *trans*-fatty acids, salt/sodium, red or processed meat and sugar-sweetened beverages.[2] In addition, in many countries overconsumption of animal-sourced foods are common and meals are often served in supersized portions, contributing to negative health outcomes.

Cheaper food has led to greater food waste, particularly in higher income countries, but the problem is also rising elsewhere. Globally, one third of all food is now lost or wasted between the farm and the plate.[11] Today's long and complex food value chains, coupled with intensive animal production, can increase the risk of fast transmission of food-borne diseases and the spill over of zoonotic agents (including viruses), as well as other food-related health risks such as anti-microbial resistance.[12,13]

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further undermine food security and nutrition.[14] It has put quality food-related jobs and remunerative livelihoods at risk in many parts of the world, highlighting the degree to which our food systems are vulnerable to shocks. Small-scale producers, migrants and seasonal workers, landless people and the urban food insecure — and particularly women and indigenous peoples — are among the worst affected.

Food systems directly employ more than 1 billion people. The majority of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers and women comprise 43% of the agricultural labour force although there are growing and concerning increases in inequities with 1% of farms operating on 70% of the world's lands. Despite their important contributions, smallholders and farm workers often suffer from malnutrition and lack of access to healthy diets. Waged and self-employed agricultural workers often lack safety and labour protection and depend on low and irregular incomes.[15]

Food consumption is equally undermining nature. It is the leading driver of food production and thereby also the main interface between human society and the environment.[16] Food consumption affects land conversion, biodiversity loss, contamination of freshwater and coastal ecosystems. Food systems account for 80% of freshwater consumption and contribute 20-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions.[16,17,18] They also strongly contribute to local air and water pollution and soil degradation.

The growing global food demand is shaped by shifting diets, but also by population growth, changing demographics, lower levels of physical activity and increasing household food waste.

The hidden costs to society of these health, socio-economic and environmental impacts of the global food system are high, at an estimated US$12 trillion every year, which is US$2 trillion above the estimated annual net value of food and land use systems.[19] If current consumption trends continue, SDGs relating to food security, public health and environmental sustainability will not be met and multiple planetary boundaries will be transgressed.[20]

While these challenges are daunting and urgent, there is good news. Transitioning to healthy diets feeding 10 billion people within environmental limits is possible.[1] While important challenges exist, health and sustainability are complementary; transitions to healthy diets have significant impacts on human, environmental, and economic health.

2. What we want to achieve: Propositions for game-changing solutions to drive the transition towards healthy and sustainable consumption in a culturally appropriate manner

Guided by the best available scientific evidence, best practice and real-world examples, Action Track 2 aims to generate game-changing propositions — including identifying novel solutions that may, as yet, be unknown — that can catalyze shifts in consumption through changes in food policy, food environments, private sector actions and offerings and consumer behaviour. A transition towards diets which are healthier and more nature positive,[i] economically equitable and socially just, needs to retain desirability while celebrating and sharing cultural identity. Key outcomes to which the proposed solutions should contribute include:

- A dramatic increase in the diversity, availability, accessibility and affordability,[21] of safe foods that contribute to healthy and sustainable diets, especially wholegrains, legumes and nuts, and fresh vegetables and fruits. Particularly for vulnerable and

[i] Key environmental dimensions of importance include greenhouse gas emissions, cropland use, water use, Nitrogen and Phosphorus use, and biodiversity.

poor population groups, sufficient quantities of healthy protein sources, including sustainably-produced dairy, eggs, blue foods (marine and freshwater fish, shellfish and algae), meat or alternative protein sources;[22]

- A major shift in demand for and/or consumption of healthy and sustainable diets, including more than doubling the consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts;[1]
- At the global level, and particularly with respect to more affluent populations, a reduction of excessive consumption of animal-sourced foods, especially red meat, and an increase in consumption of plant-rich diets;[20,23]
- A reduction of overconsumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and ultra-processed foods high in calories, unhealthy fats, free sugars, and salt/sodium;[24]
- Halving per capita food waste at household, food service and retail levels by 2030 (SDG target 12.3) and transitioning to a circular food economy where waste becomes a resource;
- Strengthened connections between consumers and producers of food, including by fostering development of more robust value chains local where feasible, creating solid alliances between farmers and civil society and harnessing the potential of food markets (including wet markets) to deliver safe, healthy and sustainable diets; and
- Improved and reoriented social and environmental sustainability of global value chains to ensure that international trade facilitates access to foods that contribute to healthy and sustainable diets.

Achieving these outcomes would unleash enormous social, economic and environmental progress, and help achieve the SDGs, the Paris Climate Accord and other internationally-agreed commitments.

Vision: By the time of the UN Food Systems Summit in autumn 2021 significant momentum is underway to shift consumption, with:

- An exciting menu of innovative game-changing solutions for shifting food consumption to healthy and sustainable patterns on the table.
- A critical mass of government, private sector, public sector and other actors ready to announce significant commitments to take action in line with such solutions.
- A global movement, inspired by the passion and leadership of young people, making changes in their daily food choices and demanding action by governments and business to enable and accelerate healthy and sustainable food consumption, by making it affordable, accessible and desirable.

3. Defining and mapping the key solution arenas

All actors in society — including local and national policymakers, private sector actors within the food system and beyond (e.g., finance and technology), consumers and citizens — have a role to play in the shift towards healthier, safe and sustainable consumption and nature positive food systems. Equity and social justice must be central to the transition, to provide the greatest benefit to all. Indicative areas for action to consider include:

A. Motivate and empower consumers to make informed, healthy, safe and sustainable choices. This could include: developing the knowledge base about drivers of consumer demand (including tradition, culture, religion, values and social norms) and how to change behaviour; investing in education about what constitutes

a healthy, safe and sustainable diet and the links between food consumption, environment and health; regulating food marketing; improving food-related sustainability and nutrition standards (for food in public institutions, and for improved nutrition labelling); developing and integrating environmental sustainability into dietary guidelines; increasing awareness, information and transparency across the food value chains to foster consumer trust and confidence in the food supply, including through digital means; and creating aspirations for food systems that deliver diets that are safe, healthy and sustainable.

B. **Improve availability and access to healthy, safe and sustainable diets.** This could include: integrated food policy and regulatory reforms to improve food environments; leveraging schools as a key environment for delivering healthy, safe and sustainable diets and fostering lifelong healthy and sustainable consumption; reforming public procurement policies; applying behavioral insights to nudge consumers as well as other food system actors to make the healthy and sustainable choice the easiest and most attractive choice (including food reformulation, product experience and changes in retail environments); mobilizing significant private/public investment to increase production, access and affordability of foods that contribute to healthy and sustainably produced diets; invest in improving food-related infrastructure and logistics systems, and shortening of supply chains; implementing trade rules that facilitate improved access to healthy, safe and sustainable diets; strengthening capacity to implement and enforce food safety laws (including CODEX standards); developing partnerships to minimize food waste in the food service, retail and home environments; and measuring and regulating consumer and retail food waste.

Incentivizing markets and corporations to provide foods for healthy and sustainable diets

There are a variety of different mechanisms to encourage corporations and markets — using both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ approaches — to reorient their activities and transition to providing foods that contribute to healthy and sustainable diets. Business-driven mechanisms include, for example, developing pre-competitive cooperation to drive consumer behavioral change, and translating years of marketing experience to encourage consumers to shift to healthier and more sustainable consumption. Government-driven mechanisms include true cost accounting, enforcement of laws on land use and conversion, fiscal measures (e.g. taxes/subsidies to encourage healthier choices; greenhouse gas emission taxes to incentivize behaviour change), regulatory measures, implementing trade rules which improve availability of foods that contribute to healthier and more sustainable diets, investment in consumer education and provision of clear population guidance on healthy and sustainable consumption (food-based dietary guidelines), product labelling requirements, building food safety nets and measures to reduce food waste. Investor-driven mechanisms can include shareholder divestment to avoid harm and social impact investing. Civil-society driven mechanisms mobilize people as consumers and voters to demand healthy, sustainable products, rejecting products which are not part of healthy and sustainable diets and demanding increased accountability from food system actors.

C. Enabling interventions. These could include:

a. Identifying common ground (e.g. sustainability as a potent motivator for dietary changes that support better health) and potential trade-offs (e.g. the need to increase animal-sourced food intakes for young children in low-income settings but the generation of greenhouse gases caused by overconsumption of certain animal-sourced foods in high-income countries) involved in shifting to consumption which is both healthy and sustainable.
b. Finding ways to off-set the costs associated with transitioning to healthy and sustainable consumption (e.g. supporting farmers, food businesses and workers that are negatively affected by change; redirecting funding; providing public infrastructure funds; providing donor funding to support change in low- and middle-income countries; facilitating access to loans and encouraging the private sector to invest).
c. Capitalizing on the growing movement to improve urban food environments, and identifying specific challenges and opportunities in both urban and rural communities.
d. Empowering women and preparing youth to be food system leaders by investing in developing their leadership, technical and managerial skills and addressing the barriers they face in accessing resources, technology and markets.
e. Prioritizing the support, protection and promotion of first food systems including breastfeeding.[25]
f. Mobilizing young people and finding common purpose with other social movements — including the health, agriculture, environment, education, sports/physical activity, faith-based and culinary communities — as critical agents of change.
g. Piloting and scaling up behaviour change interventions that are effective in reducing consumer food waste and increasing adoption of healthy and sustainable diets.
h. Promoting social justice in the food industry, protecting people employed in food systems everywhere and fostering more environmentally sustainable practices by using full supply chain traceability.

The game-changing solutions will be crowdsourced and developed through three work streams supported by a diverse leadership team and need to be tailored to local contexts, including cultural and socio-economic aspects, the specific political economy of food, how the food systems function, existence and level of implementation of policies and regulations, institutional capacities and the constraints on consumers' capacity to change what they eat. Nonetheless, any country or local jurisdiction can build an agenda for change using the broad action framework outlined above.

***Action Track Chair**: Gunhild Stordalen, EAT Foundation*
***Vice Chair**: Ajay Vir Jakhar, Bharat Krishak Samaj*
***Youth Vice Chair**: Lana Weidgenant, Real Food Systems*
***UN Anchor Organization**: World Health Organization (WHO)*

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