

**ACTION TRACK #4:**  
**ADVANCE  
EQUITABLE  
LIVELIHOODS**



## **Action Track Discussion Starter**

### **Action Track 4 – Advance Equitable Livelihoods and Value Distribution**

**1. The problem: Inequality and power imbalances – at household, community, national and global levels – are consistently constraining the ability of food systems to deliver poverty reduction and sustainable, equitable livelihoods.**

About 80% of the world's extremely poor people reside in rural areas and most rely, at least in part, on natural resource-based livelihoods for their economic well-being, and food and nutrition security. Many of these people are involved in food systems as small-scale farmers, fishers, pastoralists, as people dependent on forests and other ecosystems, or as agricultural wage workers, and those engaged in micro, small and medium enterprises along food value chains.

Some of these food producers are not remunerated – or are underpaid – for their agricultural labor or their work in food value chains. Many also lack equitable access to and ownership of agricultural assets and natural resources and incomes. Others are simply ignored. Indigenous peoples, for example, are the custodians of 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, yet their knowledge and sustainable practices have been underestimated and unsupported.

Firstly, there are objective barriers to equitable access to livelihoods, which include lack of infrastructure, systematic marginalization that limits access to services, limited skills and knowledge. Infrastructure, for instance, influences the way food is produced, processed, transported, distributed, sold, conserved and ultimately consumed. Lack of infrastructure restricts equitable access to resources and services and therefore to secure livelihoods. Our food systems also cause environmental inequity as they are the single largest driver of environmental pressure, accounting for 80% of land conversion and biodiversity loss, 80% of contamination of freshwater and coastal ecosystems, 80% of freshwater consumption and 20-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions (cross ref to AT3). Climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss also restrict access to equitable livelihoods as households and communities that are more exposed to the impacts of these trends are at higher risk.

Other social and economic inequalities, such as in access to employment opportunities, also increase vulnerability and cause political instability.<sup>[i]</sup> For instance, there is overwhelming evidence that gender-based discrimination, or the denial of women's human rights, is one of the major causes of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity (cross ref to AT1).<sup>[ii],[iii]</sup> Though technical, political, financial and other challenges to gender equality are complex, evidence illustrates that social norms and structural barriers are primary barriers to the advancement of gender equality within food systems.

Discriminatory social norms, practices and roles shape the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work; limit women's access to productive resources (such as land) and markets; underpin unequal bargaining positions and the gendered division of labor within households that results both in time poverty and malnutrition for women<sup>[iv]</sup> and; marginalize women from decision-making spheres at all levels.<sup>[v],[vi]</sup> Women and girls are just one of several groups whose livelihoods are impacted by inequity in food systems. Youth and indigenous peoples also face significant socially constructed and structural barriers. Intersectional vulnerability, which recognizes that individuals or communities often face compound discrimination based on multiple and intersecting identity factors, (such as ethnicity, gender, age, physical ability) is a challenge that requires more research and better practical and policy responses.

The denial of rights and entitlements, through formal and informal institutions and laws, is central to the problem of inequity in livelihoods within food systems. The widespread and systematic institutional discrimination and bias against marginalized groups in access to assets, services and information, can thus be attributed to the related challenges of harmful socio-cultural norms and practices, inadequate policy and poor governance, and rights denial. Unfair terms of trade, capacity deficits and inadequate financing for pro-poor development are wider challenges. The amplifying threat of Covid-19 and its differential impact on women and marginal groups, from a food security and nutrition perspective, is exacerbating an already alarming situation.

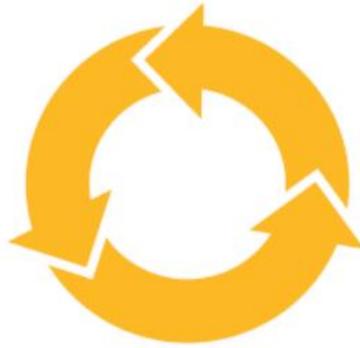
## **2. What we want to achieve: Solutions to advance equitable livelihoods in food systems**

For food systems to advance equitable livelihoods, we must tackle poverty from a multi-dimensional perspective and focus on the groups whose livelihoods (women, youth, indigenous peoples, the disabled, seasonal laborers, etc.) are most limited by current food systems practices, and the discriminatory practices and norms that limit equitable livelihoods.

Advancing equitable livelihoods requires building agency of those people in diverse food systems that lack the space or the enabling environment in which to exercise their power and rights. It implies protecting and strengthening the capacities and the knowledge, resilience and innovation that they possess.

Changing power relations in food systems is also critical, and these will require changes both in formal spheres (market negotiations, group membership, etc.) and in non-formal spheres.

**Build Agency**  
Building consciousness, confidence, self-esteem and aspirations (non-formal sphere) and knowledge, skills and capabilities (formal sphere).



## Change Relations

The power relations through which people live their lives through intimate relations and social networks (non-formal sphere) and group membership and activism, and citizen and market negotiations (formal sphere).

## Transform Structures

Discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices (non-formal sphere) and laws, policies, procedures and services (formal sphere).

Finally, the shift involves transforming structures, including confronting social norms and practices that are embedded in structures that systematically privilege some groups over others, marginalizing the poor, who often work in crop and livestock production and food value chains. We must confront the structural barriers within institutions and policies, with the aim of achieving lasting change so that food systems can lead to equitable, sustainable livelihoods, rather than just temporary or seasonal increases in opportunities. Within food systems, this transformation means adjustments to regimes that regulate access to, use of and control over resources, especially those defining land distribution, labor division and decision-making power.

Central to advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems are the nearly 500 million small-scale food producers who often work in fragile and vulnerable terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Their production choices, technologies, natural resource management, and market links to value chains determine not only the sustainability and resilience of their livelihoods and their capacity to overcome poverty and food insecurity, but also the diversity of food that will be available to their communities and to consumers and the prices they will pay. Equally, the choices made by consumers and the processors, wholesalers and retailers who supply them with food, affects the opportunities available for small-scale producers. But livelihoods in food systems also include wage labor and business along food value chains, and international migrant workers who often have less access to services or support due to their different citizenship status.

The role and potential of the agricultural private sector (corporations, small- and medium- sized enterprises, small businesses, women self-help groups etc.), also needs to be recognized and leveraged to improve equitable access to livelihoods. The private sector holds the potential to generate much-needed investment in agriculture and food systems and ensure responsible and culturally appropriate supply chains that can benefit small-scale producers, workers and consumers. However, irresponsible and inappropriate business and financial sector operations can undermine this potential. Responsible investments in food and agriculture require the proactive engagement and commitment of all partners. It is imperative that global financial

institutions and organizations cooperate towards responsible investment in agri-food value chains.

Barriers that hamper access to financing for the private sector also need to be addressed. Increasing investment and access to finance is critical to achieve rural transformation, especially for small-scale food producers and rural micro, small and medium agri-food enterprises. In this context, public finance can play an important role in supporting rural transformation and investment in food systems, mitigating risks and attracting more private investment.

**Vision:** Our vision is of food systems that are inclusive and diverse and which contribute to the elimination of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity by creating jobs, raising incomes across food value chains, protecting and enhancing cultural and social capital, reducing risks for the poorest and increasing value distribution. This vision cannot be realized by crossing planetary boundaries and implies the protection and enhancement of natural ecosystems and tackling climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

To support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Action Track 4 will seek to ensure that food systems 'Leave No One Behind' by addressing inequality as one of the root causes of poverty in all its forms: inequality in access to economic opportunities, gender inequality and inequality in access to productive resources and services that restrict the advancement of equitable livelihoods.

By the time of the Summit in 2021, we will take forward:

- An innovative set of inclusive, varied and gender-responsive solutions, that are people-centered and respectful of diversity and indigenous knowledge, for the advancement of equitable livelihoods in food systems is developed and socialized.
- A critical mass of government, private sector, public sector, community-based entities and other actors ready to announce significant commitments to act in line with these solutions.
- A global movement, with previously unheard voices, emerging to challenge inequity in food systems livelihoods and public, private and voluntary sector bodies are responsive and supportive.

### **3.0 Defining and mapping solution areas**

With these central roles in mind, the following non-exhaustive action areas can be mapped.

**Anchoring food systems transformation in small- and medium-scale production, family farmers, indigenous peoples, women and workers in food value chains:** The centrality of small- and medium-scale producers is key due their sustainable and diversified forms of production, generation of employment, adaptive capacity, contribution to resilience, and role in sustaining rural (including coastal) communities, indigenous knowledge and local and regional economies. Strengthening their organizations' abilities to aggregate value, hold duty bearers to account and promote access to finance, services and markets is also crucial.

**Addressing specific barriers to inclusive, equitable livelihood development:** Food system transformation that does not address inequalities and specific vulnerabilities risks reinforcing and deepening inequalities and undermining the resilience of food systems. Partnerships can integrate smaller, vulnerable actors into more efficient and equitable food value chains, while strengthened producer organizations, farmer and livestock consumer cooperatives, and other collectives can effectively address existing inequality, reach economies of scale and minimize elite capture and urban bias.

**Coherent and coordinated multisectoral approach at national and territorial levels:** Action to advance equitable livelihoods in the context of food systems will require multisectoral coordination and policy coherence across sectors, stakeholders and national and international value chains. It will also require supporting and engaging with social movements.

Policies and action advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems needs to **explicitly recognize and respond to the specific constraints faced by rural women and girls** and their roles in food systems ensuring their participation in decision making and that their rights are secured and protected regarding, for example, land tenure and access to knowledge, dignified work, natural resources and markets. Action to prevent, mitigate and eliminate gender-based violence is imperative in the pursuit of equitable livelihoods.

Policies and action advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems also need to **explicitly recognize the role that indigenous peoples play** within localized food systems and natural resource management, the specific marginalization they face and include specific measures that ensure the respect of indigenous peoples' rights and their participation in decision making.

Policies and action for advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems must **meet the needs and build the agency of other marginalized groups** such as youth, the elderly or disabled and seasonal, migrant or low wage workers in fragile or vulnerable food value chains.

**Inclusion of pro-poor nature-based solutions and climate change and environment policies to improve the capacity of the poor to manage risks.** Climate change and extreme weather events have immediate and long-term impacts on food systems through the impact on the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable communities (cross ref AT5). Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss have acute consequences for indigenous peoples and food producers in marginal terrestrial and marine ecosystems (cross ref AT3).

**Focus efforts on making value chains inclusive through the generation of decent employment and improving resilience through social protection.** Expanded social protection is central to facilitate an inclusive process of food system transformation, in terms of protecting incomes, facilitating risk management, fostering economic inclusion and realizing rights. Social protection needs to be nutrition-sensitive, adaptive and responsive and tailored to the needs of the poor, in particular women, youth and indigenous peoples.

**Address the legal, institutional and market constraints to the realization of equity within food systems,** such as ensuring that the laws, norms and regulatory mechanisms coupled with

the capacity of institutions and communities to implement them are adequate. Ensuring that international convention and treaty obligations related to equity and rights are enshrined in national legal frameworks and that mechanisms for application of the law or dispute settlement are functioning, accountable and accessible to marginalized groups.

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**UN Anchor Organization:** *IFAD*

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## *References*

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