



UNITED NATIONS
FOOD SYSTEMS
SUMMIT 2021

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 extreme poor reside in rural areas and most rely, at least in part, on natural resource-based livelihoods for their economic well-being and food security and nutrition. Most of the poorest are involved in food systems as small-scale agricultural producers, fishers, pastoralists or forest-dependent communities as well as agricultural wage workers, and those engaged in micro, small and medium enterprises along food value chains. Inequality in access to and ownership of agricultural assets and natural resources and income are complex and related concerns for poverty and food security and nutrition.

Other social and economic inequalities, inequality in access to employment opportunity and limited access to services that prevent the development of inclusive, equitable livelihoods, also increase vulnerability and cause political instability.ⁱ

These are persistent challenges. 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, for example (cross ref to AT1).^{ii,iii} Though technical, political, financial and other challenges to gender equality are complex, evidence illustrates that social norms and structural barriers are the 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 labour within households that results both in time poverty and malnutrition for women^{iv} and; marginalize women from decision-making spheres at all levels.^{v,vi} Women are just one of the vulnerable groups whose livelihoods are impacted by inequity in food systems. Youth and indigenous peoples also face significant barriers to equitable livelihoods across the food value chain and intersectional vulnerability, whereby people experience discrimination for more than one reason, 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 also 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 such as – land, credit, education, training and extension, employment



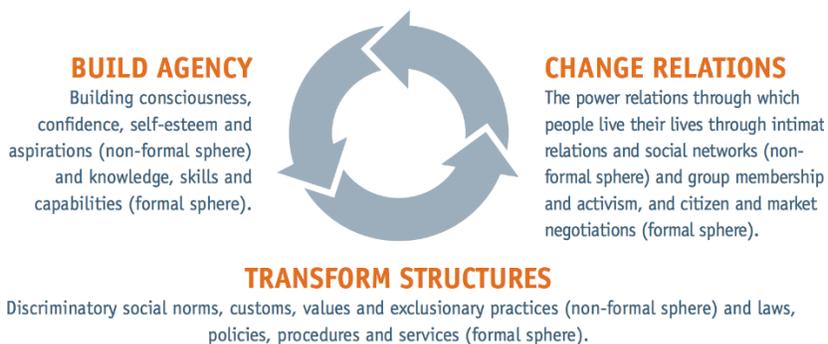
opportunities, mobility, climate and market information, and agricultural inputs and technologies – can thus be attributed to the dual challenges of harmful socio-cultural norms and practices and rights denial. The amplifying threat of Covid-19 and its differential impact on women and marginal groups, from a food security and nutrition perspective, is exacerbating an already alarming situation. 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 contributing 20-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions (cross ref to AT3).

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

For food systems to advance equitable livelihoods, we must look at poverty across the food value chain, the groups whose livelihoods are most limited by current food systems practices, and the discriminatory practices and norms that limit equitable livelihoods, in particular for those whose livelihoods are most marginalized (women, youth, indigenous peoples).

Advancing equitable livelihoods requires building agency of powerless people in food systems (e.g. small-scale producers, indigenous people, women farmers, seasonal laborers) including building confidence and consciousness, and also the requisite skills, knowledge and capabilities.

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.



Finally, the shift involves transforming structures, including confronting social norms and practices that are embedded in structures that systematically privilege some groups over others, in particular marginalizing the poorest of the poor – who often work in agriculture 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 in these systems. 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 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 labour and business along food value chains, meaning that equity needs to be reflected here also.

Vision: Our vision is of food systems that are inclusive and contributing to the elimination of poverty by creating jobs, raising incomes across food value chains, reducing risks for the poorest and most vulnerable and increasing value distribution.

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 see the following developments:

- An innovative set of solutions for the advancement of equitable livelihoods in food systems is developed and socialized
- A critical mass of government, private sector, public sector and other actors is ready to announce significant commitments to take action in line with these solutions
- A global movement, with previously unheard voices, is emerging to challenge inequity in food systems livelihoods and public, private and voluntary sector bodies are responsive and supportive

3. Defining and mapping solution arenas

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

Anchoring food systems transformation in small-scale production: The centrality of small-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 communities and local and regional economies. Strengthening their organizations' abilities to aggregate value, hold duty bearers to account and promote access to 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 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.

Policy around food systems needs to explicitly recognize and respond to the specific constraints faced by rural women and their roles in agri-food systems ensuring their participation in decision making and that their rights are secured and protected regarding, for example, land tenure and access to natural resources and markets. Action to prevent, mitigate and eliminate GBV is imperative in the pursuit of equitable livelihoods.

Policies also need to explicitly recognize the role that indigenous people 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.

Inclusion of pro-poor nature-based solutions and climate change policies to improve the capacity of the poor to manage climate 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)

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 realising rights. Social protection needs to be nutrition-sensitive, adaptive and responsive and tailored to the needs of the poor, in particular women 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 marginalised groups.

Action Track Chair: *Michelle Nunn, CARE USA*

Vice Chair: *Shakuntala Thilsted, World Fish*

Youth Vice Chair: *Mai Thin Yu Mon, UN Global Indigenous Youth Caucus; Indigenous Peoples Development Program of Chin Human Rights Organization*

UN Anchor Organization: *International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*

12 October 2020



References

- i Action Track 4 Science Paper - pending
- ii FAO, 2019, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World
- iii WFP, 2020, The power of gender equality for food security: Closing another gender data gap with a new quantitative measure
- iv Chopra, D., and Zambelli, E., 2017, No Time to Rest: Women's Lived Experiences of Balancing Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work
- v CFS, 2017, Forum on Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition
- vi De Schutter, O., 2012, Women's rights and the right to food, UN Human Rights Council