OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR THE FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

Information Note March 2021

As a part of the Decade of Action for the SDGs, the United Nations Secretary-General is convening a Food Systems Summit in 2021 aimed at empowering people to leverage food systems as accelerators of progress to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following Information Note is intended to provide an update on the status of the Summit process, particularly in light of the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the Food Systems Summit Advisory Committee.

RECENT UPDATES

Fourth Meeting of the Summit Advisory Committee: The UN Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) chaired the fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee on 19 March 2021. Opening the meeting, the DSG noted the real work of the Summit has begun as Member States and other stakeholders have engaged in the Summit work streams and are offering their energy and ideas about how we move the needle on improving our food systems in support of the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. The DSG welcomed the progress made so far and all the contributions of ideas and the support to the Summit by a wide range of stakeholders. Special recognition was given to Italy and to the RBAs for their support with preparations towards the Pre-Summit moment, now planned for 19-21 July 2021. The DSG also informed that a meeting with all Member States will be convened in April to inform on progress and receive feedback.

The Special Envoy provided an overview of the progress in each of the Summit’s major areas of work as outlined below and looked forward to continuing to build on the preliminary work done so far. The Envoy noted that effort has been made to engage with Member States in Geneva, Nairobi, New York and Rome as well as with specific constituencies, including Indigenous Peoples, Farmer and Producer organizations, Youth leaders, Civil Society, and the Private Sector. The Envoy welcomed the uptake of the Food Systems Summit Dialogues programme, as these are important opportunities for national progress and community mobilization to improve food systems at national and sub-national level.

Presentation of Emerging Frameworks of Action and Solutions

The Deputy to the Special Envoy presented several pieces of work that are emerging through the Summit process over more than six months, with contributions through Action Tracks, Dialogues, open fora, public surveys, events, and meetings with Member States and several self-organizing constituency groups. In particular, the Deputy spoke to the latest consolidated thinking around the Summit’s Vision of Success, a Statement of Action that will capture the key insights and priorities of what is emerging through the Summit process to advance the 2030 Agenda, and the Emerging Propositions and Areas for Collective Action that stakeholders around the world are putting forward to deliver on all goals for people, planet, and prosperity.
Overall, the Summit Secretariat noted that it received more than 1200 ideas and propositions to improve food systems to achieve the SDGs, showing the nature of this Summit as both a “Solutions Summit” and a “People’s Summit”, where all actors are putting ideas on the table and also stepping forward to prioritize actions that make sense for improving food systems in their own context. The propositions ranged from the very local to regional and global. They came in from all types of stakeholders. More specifically, Member States submitted 123 propositions, producer organizations, indigenous peoples and civil society submitted more than 400 ideas, a third of the total, while academia and private sector submitted approximately 200 and 250 respectively.

The Secretariat and Summit Action Track teams then spent several weeks in February and March carefully considering and assessing ideas and propositions against key criteria of impact at scale, actionability, sustainability, and alignment to the vision of the 2030 Agenda. The documents discussed with the Advisory Committee represent a consolidation of what was heard from the landscape, and the Summit will now be entering a next phase of consultation through the of April to get feedback on what is emerging, see where there are gaps, and identify more ideas and ambition where required to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Scientific Group Update and Presentation of Work Plan**

The Chair of the Scientific Group, Dr. Joachim von Braun, provided an overview of the work of the Group, noting that members were participating in all five Action Tracks, preparing thematic issue briefs in partnership with other leading scientific networks as well as the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the CFS, supporting global youth science academics to engage and support their growth, and putting a special focus on small farm innovators and knowledge from indigenous communities. The Chair noted that the Group was not “reinventing wheels”, but focused on building on the existing body of research in ways that make a useful contribution to Summit outcomes and help to advance the science in this area.

The Chair informed that the Committee is participating in several key events and engagements over the coming months and would be organizing “Food Systems Summit Science Days” from 8-9 July. These will focus on highlighting the centrality of Science, Technology, and Innovation for food systems transformation, and increase awareness and inspire trust in science. The event will include diversity and conflicts of perspectives based on science, thereby facilitating rationalization and inclusiveness of debate. The group has met six times and is meeting monthly in the run-up to the Summit. All information on the Scientific Group can be found on the FoodSystems.Community and Scientific Group website.

**Summary of the Discussion**

Various Members took the floor throughout the meeting to provide feedback:
- Several appreciated the preview of emerging materials and welcomed the impressive progress made.
- Several reiterated their offers to support outreach and engagement of various groups while also stressing the importance of engaging as many Member States and other stakeholders in the process as possible. Particular efforts are needed
to engage with the full membership, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as marginalized groups.

- A few Members welcomed the emerging areas of collective action, but would like to see some enhancements and refinements, such as including a reference to the One Health approach, or bringing together some areas of collective action to make something bigger, more systemic, and more ambitious.
- Others noted how important it will be for the Summit to use agreed language and concepts that are already part of the 2030 Agenda and other existing agreements. Action Tracks, the Scientific Group, and Summit leadership were requested not to invent new language and concepts, and to ensure feedback from Member States is taken onboard. It was further noted that the Summit should generate voluntary commitments, but it should in no way create binding commitments or new mechanisms – including for Summit follow-up and review. There are particular opportunities to build off the RBAs and CFS.
- A few members recommended that the Summit build on the policy documents and tools that the CFS has developed over the years. These policy products should be better understood and promoted through the Summit.
- More engagement with social science and continuing to strengthen the human rights perspective in the Summit was also encouraged. It was recognized that family farmers have made important contributions to the process, but that these contributions could be better reflected and the engagement further deepened. Family farmers should be appreciated as agents of change in the outcome.
- Some members noted the need to shift significantly more attention from process to the urgency for action. There was a request to strive for a focused vision and a limited set of emerging priorities to mobilize action for the SDGs, whether from Member States, civil society, or private sector.
- The Summit leadership was recognized for its inclusive process, acknowledging that progress will require everyone to step out of their comfort zone, even while stressing the need to continue deepening engagement with constituency groups and find more ways to recognize inputs into the Summit materials.
- In relation to the Scientific Group, members wanted to better understand how emerging briefing papers will fuel the work of Action Tracks so that the science is joined up with the real action of the Summit process.
- The Scientific Group was encouraged to work very closely with the HLPE. The Group concurred, noting that the aim is to be complementarity and build on the materials that already exist in the HLPE, while recognizing that the HLPE has not addressed all relevant topics.
- The Scientific Group will now proceed with assessing all proposed solutions emerging from the Action Tracks process through participatory assessment.

In closing, the DSG reinforced that everything is in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Summit documents should reflect this. Frameworks, goals and targets, mechanisms and institutions are all in place within the SDGs. The Summit process needs to lift these higher to achieve the 2030 Agenda, which is even more important today in the context of response and recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**OTHER UPDATES**

The Summit engagement process and outreach efforts also continue to advance:

- **Action Tracks and Levers of Change:** The Leadership for the Action Tracks each posted emerging syntheses of the propositions they received over the past
several months on the FoodSystems.Community platform to share transparently what is emerging from various stakeholders for consideration in the overall Summit process. Similarly, the Custodians for all four Levers of Change have put “Discussion Starter” papers and presentation on the platform (Finance, Gender & Women’s Empowerment, Human Rights & Law, and Innovation). These were shared for meetings with the Rome-Based Group of Friends in March, as well as their own open forums with the broader public in a few instances. Following feedback from the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat and Action Tracks are now preparing an updated draft approach on action areas that will be shared with Member States and all other stakeholder groups in the near future, initiating a next phase of global consultation and engagement in the Summit process through the end of April. This feedback from all constituencies will significantly strengthen the propositions by May, against which the Summit and global community will then start working to operationalize priority actions.

• **Food Systems Summit Dialogues (FSSDs):** As of 24 March, 75 Member States have formally confirmed their intention to convene national FSSDs, and the window remains open for additional Member States to step forward. The FSSD “toolkit” is online and translated into all official languages of the UN, plus Portuguese. Over 130 briefings and trainings have been conducted for Member States, UN entities and other organizations as well as all other stakeholder groups, engaging over 2,500 people so far. The second Global Food Systems Summit Dialogue took place 20 January during Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in partnership with UAE, the High-Level Dialogue on Energy, and IRENA. The session attracted over 1,000 delegates to hear proposals from ministers, non-government executives, and youth delegates on potential Summit actions with simultaneous food, energy, and climate benefits. The Independent Dialogue programme is live and dialogues in this work stream are underway, with over 150 Dialogues registered. Alongside the IFAD Farmer’s Forum, the Secretariat launched a Step-by-Step Guide for Independent Dialogue convenors in all official languages and announced focused efforts to reach marginalized groups. As information on all Dialogues becomes available it will be updated on the FSS Dialogues Gateway.

• **Champions Network:** Under the stewardship of its Chair and nine Vice Chairs, the Network continues to meet monthly as a network of networks. It is reaching out to communities, ensuring the Summit builds on existing institutions and mechanisms, but can also best incorporate other communities and ideas that are not normally heard. It will bring in significant numbers and allows for feedback to come back to the Secretariat on the various streams of work. The Champions Network now has 90 members across 55 countries, who are actively supporting the Summit’s effort to improve food systems by providing ideas on areas for collective action, supporting the FSSD programme, and mobilizing for action.

• **Digital Platform:** Each of the Summit’s workstream leaders continue to monitor their public space on the UNFSS Community Platform – FoodSystems.Community – as an avenue to continue open discussions and cultivate ideas around game changing solutions going forward. All members of the Action Tracks teams and the four Levers of Change have been encouraged to participate. A self-organizing Youth constituency group has also launched a youth community page and is actively engaging in dialogue around all elements of the Summit process.

• **UN Taskforce:** Having met 5 times since September 2020 and twice at Principal level, the UN Taskforce has over 35 UN agencies participating including the Rome Based Agencies, the World Bank, World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. Under the leadership of UNEP as Chair, UNICEF and UNDP as Vice Chairs, the Task Force is contributing to the Action Tracks and Cross-cutting
Levers, the FSSDs at country and regional level, coordinating on communications and taking a lead in exploring what the Summit process and outcomes might mean for the UN system as a whole.

- **Resource Mobilization**: Thanks to the Member States that stepped forward and the Rome-based Agencies (FAO, IFAD, and WFP), the Summit closed out 2020 on strong financial footing and has been able to advance its work plans in all areas. Other Member States from all regions of the world are being sought to close the Summit’s remaining funding gap in 2021.

- **Pre-Summit and Summit Preparations**: The Pre-Summit moment will take place over the course of three days, from 19-21 July. Given the timing and current state of affairs, the moment will inevitably be shaped programmatically and operationally by COVID-19. The Pre-Summit will take a hybrid approach with an in-person component that will take place at the FAO Headquarters in Rome, complemented by a vast virtual program and platform, which enables meaningful global engagement and inclusion of millions of people in countries, cities, and communities all around the globe. This aspect of global engagement and inclusion is essential, and will influence not only the technical approach, but also nature and design of the program itself in terms of substance, speakers, interactivity, languages, session timing, and beyond. The nature of the in-person component of the Pre-Summit in FAO will be determined by COVID-19 protocols over time and what is deemed safe and possible. The Summit moment will take place in conjunction with the UN General Assembly in late September.

**External Engagement and Outreach**: The Special Envoy and Summit Secretariat continue to engage communities, geographies and constituencies wherever possible to raise awareness of the Summit, draw important linkages and benefit from the perspectives and inputs of various stakeholder – including indigenous peoples and young people. Recent high-level engagements have included, but aren’t limited to, the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, the Climate Adaptation Summit, the Global Forum on Food and Agriculture, the 47th Session of the CFS, the IFAD Governing Council, the Forum on the Future of Agriculture, the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development organized by the UN Regional Commissions, among others.

The Special Envoy and Secretariat are also deepening engagement and aligning on shared messaging and priorities with other priority Summits and agendas across the UN system. In early March, the Special Envoy met with the President of the General Assembly to explore opportunities for alignment and support to the Assembly’s work. On 1 February, the Special Envoy participated in a retreat chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General focused on maximizing synergies and aligning a shared narrative across many events in 2021 and 2022 to advance the 2030 Agenda. In follow up to this meeting, the Special Envoy has reached out to counterparts leading all major moments and is seeking to identify areas of shared priority to advance action. So far, meetings have been held with the Special Envoy for the Oceans and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Climate Action. Other engagements are coming up with the DG of the World Health Organization, the President of UNFCCC COP26, leadership of UNCBD COP15, and leadership of the UNCCD COP.

There is increased public mobilization and engagement at all levels. There are focused amplification efforts centered around the Action Tracks, Scientific Group and the FSSDs, but also on promoting greater understanding of food systems and mobilization towards actions in support of the SDGs. More than 2000 people participated in the second round of live Action Track public forums in February with
more than 5000 viewers post-event. All recordings of public forums and Dialogue briefings are on the Summit’s [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) channels.

**Food Systems Heroes** continue to step forward, with more than 4,000 members from across 155 countries now engaging the Summit and committed to championing for improved food systems in their own communities.

The Summit’s website is the primary information and outreach platform, hosting pages with [events](https://www.foodsystemssummit.org/events), news and [commentary](https://www.foodsystemssummit.org/commentary) (including contributions from youth, UN leaders as well as perspective on agroecology from civil society), press information, and engagement opportunities and resources. A strategic focus on content generation, optimization and promotion since January 2021 has captured 254% more users and increased site engagement by 277%. An equal focus on social media means that, collectively, the Summit’s digital channels are now reaching an audience of 40 million. The Summit has also received increased media coverage in all languages.

The Summit Secretariat continues to welcome everyone to step forward with their views and to promote improved foods systems in their own community.

Summit social media:
- Twitter: @FoodSystems @Agnes_Kalibata
- Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/unfoodsystems/](https://www.instagram.com/unfoodsystems/)
- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/UNFoodSystems](https://www.facebook.com/UNFoodSystems)
- Medium: [https://un-food-systems.medium.com/](https://un-food-systems.medium.com/)

**NEXT STEPS**

Until early May, the Secretariat and Action Tracks will continue to seek ideas around solutions to improve food systems in each of the Summit’s focus areas. The Secretariat will continue to post documentation as it emerges online to focus review and feedback from all stakeholders. The Secretariat will also release initial reports synthesizing the contributions of Member State-led Dialogues and independent organizers around the world ahead of the next Advisory Committee meeting, providing the Summit with feedback on what various communities view as working and not working in their food systems.

The Summit continues to call for all actors - countries, consumers, private sector, producers, civil society, youth activists, indigenous leaders, scientists and many others - to get engaged, have their voices heard, and take forward action in their own way. The Summit seeks a high ambition, and recognizes that honest, courageous conversations are needed that recognize points of divergence and try to bring actors closer together. This engagement is essential to unlocking bold actions for people, the planet, and shared prosperity.

For queries, contact [foodsystemssummit@un.org](mailto:foodsystemssummit@un.org)

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