

UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT 2021

In 2021, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, will convene a [Food Systems Summit](#) as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This is a guide to the Summit and a summary of IFAD's core messages on food systems.

This note outlines the background to the United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021, IFAD's role in the Summit, and main outreach messages. It is intended to aid internal coherence in IFAD's engagement and to promote external dialogue with partners – especially Member States – around the issues at stake at the Summit.

IFAD'S ENGAGEMENT AND KEY MESSAGES

KEY MESSAGE 1

Sustainable food systems are integral to global resilience and peace.

KEY MESSAGE 2

For food systems to be sustainable, they must create decent livelihoods for the people who work within them – especially small-scale farmers, and other rural workers involved in the processing, storage and marketing of food.

KEY MESSAGE 3

Small-scale farming systems are often more environmentally sustainable than industrial scale systems.

KEY MESSAGE 4

Food systems that are built on the bedrock of prosperous and productive small-scale farms contribute to resilient and equitable rural communities, and to feeding vulnerable people.

KEY MESSAGE 5

More – but also smarter – investments in small-scale farming are needed, including through multi-stakeholder partnerships that leverage mutually beneficial investments from the private sector.

KEY MESSAGE 6

IFAD has a robust evidence base demonstrating which actions are most transformative for small-scale farmers and other rural people.

BACKGROUND TO THE SUMMIT

What is a food system?

A food system includes all the aspects of **feeding and nourishing people**: growing, harvesting, packaging, processing, transporting, marketing and consuming food. It encompasses all the **interactions between people and the natural world** – land, climate, water, etc. – and their effects on human health and nutrition. It includes the **inputs, institutions, infrastructure and services** that

support the functioning of all these aspects. And it also includes the role of diets and cultural practices in shaping outcomes.

A food system is **sustainable** when it provides sufficient nutritious food for all without compromising the health of the planet or the prospects of future generations having their food and nutritional needs met.

What is the global context and why is the UN convening a Food Systems Summit?

Even before the onset of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), food systems faced enormous challenges. **Hunger** had been rising for several years, reaching 690 million in 2019, while healthy diets were unaffordable for at least 3 billion people.¹ At the same time, the impacts of **climate change** on production were already stark, and the need to address concerns related to greenhouse gas emissions² and **environmental footprints** increasingly urgent. Further, the impact of food systems on the emergence of infectious diseases – as a result of their contribution to biodiversity loss and damage to ecosystems – has been acknowledged.³

Today, as a result of potential – and already observed – impacts of the pandemic on food systems, we face the prospect of as many as 132 million people being added to the numbers of the hungry by the end of 2020.⁴

Clearly, our food systems are deeply unsustainable. Further, only 10 years remain until 2030 and many of the 17 **SDGs** are still far out of reach, with unsafe or unsustainable food systems being part of the problem in many cases. This is why we need a **transformation of our food systems**.

A transformation of food systems would encompass fundamental changes and enhancements in the **institutions, infrastructure, regulations and markets** that shape food systems investments and activities, to make them more equitable and sustainable – from the perspectives of both workers who derive their livelihoods from food systems and buyers of food, that is, the general public. It would enable food producers and other workers within food systems to **sustainably provide nutritious food for all** and to be **adequately rewarded for their work** so that they do not themselves become vulnerable to hunger.

1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets. Rome, FAO.

2 FAO. 2016. Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use. Online. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6340e.pdf>.

3 Di Marco, M. et al. Opinion: Sustainable development must account for pandemic risk. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 2020, 117, 3888-3892.

4 See footnote 1.

Does IFAD have an official role at the Summit?

There are five “[action tracks](#)” intended to highlight essential pathways for transforming food systems to support the SDGs. IFAD has been designated the UN anchoring agency for Action Track 4, “**Advance equitable livelihoods and value distribution**”.⁵

Action tracks include representatives from the science community, private sector, Member States, civil society, and more. The UN anchoring agency role will entail significant work and close coordination with the Action Track 4 Chair (Care) and Vice-Chairs (WorldFish and the UN Global Indigenous Youth Caucus).

In addition, IFAD is contributing to the development and coordination of the Summit through participation in the Advisory Committee, the Group of Friends and the UN Task Force. This enables IFAD to help shape the Summit and its preparatory process, feed in unique knowledge, and keep Member States engaged and informed. IFAD also contributes to the work of the Summit Secretariat, including through the secondment of two IFAD staff members.

What does IFAD aim to achieve at the Summit?

IFAD’s main aims at the Summit will be to:

Put **small-scale farmers** and other **rural people** at the heart of transforming food systems and achieving the SDGs

Use IFAD’s expertise and knowledge to advance discussions and contribute to **action-oriented global commitments** to sustainably transform food systems

Raise IFAD’s global profile and visibility, especially in terms of its key role in scaling up positive impacts through sharing innovation, assembling investment through multi-stakeholder partnerships, and engaging in **policy dialogue**

⁵ The full list of action tracks is as follows: 1. Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; 2. Shift to sustainable consumption patterns; 3. Boost nature-positive production at sufficient scale; 4. Advance equitable livelihoods and value distribution; 5. Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.

IFAD'S KEY OUTREACH MESSAGES FOR THE SUMMIT

Some of IFAD's core messages for the Summit are outlined below.

Key message 1

Sustainable food systems are integral to global **resilience and peace**. There can be no peace without sustainable food systems, while sustainable food systems are in turn difficult to realize without peace. Sustainable food systems, through their contribution to preserving biodiversity, are also key to human health and resilience, in particular because of the link between environmental degradation and the spread of infectious diseases.

Supporting evidence:

- Over 60 per cent of the world's hungry people live in contexts affected by conflict.⁶
- The number and severity of violent conflicts have been linked to the unaffordability of food in countries such as Nigeria, while drought has preceded conflict in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.⁷ During the Arab Spring, high food prices were cited as one of the factors that contributed to tension and unrest.⁸ In Haiti, in 2008, riots linked to high food prices ultimately caused the government to fall.⁹
- There is much emerging evidence of the link between biodiversity loss – a key issue in agricultural production – and pathogen transmission between humans, livestock and wildlife.¹⁰

Key message 2

For food systems to be sustainable, they must create **decent livelihoods** for the people who work within them – especially **small-scale farmers**, and other rural workers involved in the processing, storage and marketing of food. Consulting and taking on board the unique perspectives of groups such as **as indigenous peoples, women and youth** – engaging their organizations – is integral to promoting food systems that work for the people whose labour they rely upon.

Supporting evidence:

- Despite small-scale farming systems contributing over half of the calories produced in the world¹¹ small-scale farmers and other rural people are disproportionately represented among the numbers of the poor and hungry,¹² with indigenous peoples, women and youth particularly vulnerable.
- When small-scale farmers improve their livelihoods, their higher incomes are overwhelmingly injected back into the rural economy (much of it in the form of higher spending on non-food consumables and on equipment, technology and services to support agricultural production) creating growth and generating jobs.¹³

6 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2017. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security. Rome, FAO.

7 IFPRI. 2015. Chapter 7: Conflict and Food Insecurity: How do we break the links. In: 2014-2015 Global food policy report. IFPRI, Washington, D.C.

Key message 3

Small-scale farming systems are often more **environmentally sustainable than industrial scale systems**. Small-scale farmers – through their work and cultures – are intimately attached to the natural environment, making them important custodians of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Supporting evidence:

- Sustainable approaches to agriculture such as agroecology, organic agriculture and permaculture rely on the intimate knowledge of local landscapes, biodiversity and ecosystems that these small-scale farmers possess.

Key message 4

Food systems that are built on the bedrock of **prosperous and productive small-scale farms** contribute to **resilient and equitable rural communities**, and to **feeding vulnerable people**. When small farms thrive, profits are injected into rural economies, where they create jobs and growth. And **community cohesion and engagement** tends to be stronger in rural communities with local food systems rooted in family-based small-scale agriculture.

Supporting evidence:

- Food systems dominated by small-scale farming are the most important for feeding people who are vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Small-scale farms serve predominantly domestic and local markets,¹⁴ they serve areas and communities that modern supermarkets do not reach, and they are especially important in developing countries,¹⁵ where hunger is more likely to prevail.
- Communities where small-scale farming is predominant enjoy higher levels of civic and social engagement, higher levels of trust, and more attachment to local cultures and landscapes.¹⁶

8 Bouzar, K. n.d. No peace, no sustainable development: A vicious cycle we can break. [Online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/no-peace-no-sustainable-development-vicious-cycle-we-can-break>

9 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-haiti-idUSN1228245020080413>

10 Refer to footnote 3: Di Marco et al. (2020).

11 Small-scale dominated farming systems produce more than 50 per cent of global calories on 30 per cent of the agricultural land (L. H. Samberg, J.S. Gerber, N. Ramankutty, M. Herrero & P.C. West. 2016. Subnational distribution of average farm size and smallholder contributions to global food production. *Environmental Research Letters*, Vol 11: 12).

12 An estimated 79 per cent of those experiencing poverty live in rural areas (World Bank. 2018. *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*. World Bank, Washington, D.C. World Bank).

13 There is a rich literature on the growth linkage associated with higher incomes among small-scale farmers; much of it is summarized in: Ellis F (2013) Topic guide: Agriculture and growth. [Online]. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a1040f0b649740003d8/EoD_TG01_Mar-squared012_Agriculture_and_Growth.pdf

14 As emphasized in the Committee on World Food Security Policy Recommendations on Connecting Smallholders to Markets; available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf>; see also Reardon, T. and Berdegue, J.A. 2016. Agrifood markets and value chains. In: Rural Development Report. Rome, IFAD: p.240.

15 Samberg et al. (2016) [footnote 11] estimate that small-scale farm dominated systems produce more than 70 per cent of the food calories produced in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and South and East Asia.

16 This is in contrast to larger farming models managed by corporate managers, and is outlined in: FAO and IFAD. 2019. The future of family farming in the context of the 2030 Agenda: p.7.

Key message 5

More – but also smarter – investments in small-scale farming are needed, including through multi-stakeholder partnerships that leverage **mutually beneficial investments from the private sector**.

Supporting evidence:

- An additional US\$14 billion needs to be invested each year by donor governments, with a focus on small-scale farming, in order to end hunger, double the incomes of small-scale farmers and limit agricultural emissions in line with the Paris Climate Agreement.¹⁷

Key message 6

IFAD has a robust **evidence base** demonstrating which actions are most **transformative for small-scale farmers and other rural people**. These actions must be reflected in **concrete commitments from the Summit**, specifically targeted at small-scale farmers and prioritizing a **long-term horizon**.

Supporting evidence:

- IFAD has over 40 years' experience investing in rural people, especially small-scale farmers. We have a range of proven tools and approaches that enable our work with rural people, building their resilience, improving their livelihoods, and realizing their essential contribution to achieving the SDGs.
- Between 2016 and 2018, IFAD investments enabled 62 million people to achieve positive economic mobility, 50 million people to improve their production, 50 million people to access markets, and 26 million people to improve their resilience.

¹⁷ Laborde, D., Murphy, S., Parent, M., Porciello, J. & Smaller C. (2020). Ceres2030: Sustainable Solutions to End Hunger - Summary Report. Cornell University, IFPRI and IISD.



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