

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 23 June 2021 19:00 GMT +02:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Sustainability: Just A Buzzword?
CONVENED BY	Jane Alice Liu, Editor-in-Chief of FoodUnfolded, EIT Food
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/13947/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	No borders

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

50

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0 0-18

30 19-30

18 31-50

2 51-65

0 66-80

0 80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

13 Male

37 Female

0 Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

2 Agriculture/crops

2 Fish and aquaculture

0 Livestock

2 Agro-forestry

2 Environment and ecology

3 Trade and commerce

11 Education

5 Communication

3 Food processing

1 Food retail, markets

4 Food industry

3 Financial Services

0 Health care

1 Nutrition

0 National or local government

0 Utilities

0 Industrial

11 Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

8 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

0 Large national business

1 Multi-national corporation

0 Small-scale farmer

0 Medium-scale farmer

0 Large-scale farmer

2 Local Non-Governmental Organization

5 International Non-Governmental Organization

0 Indigenous People

13 Science and academia

0 Workers and trade union

0 Member of Parliament

0 Local authority

0 Government and national institution

0 Regional economic community

0 United Nations

0 International financial institution

0 Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

18 Consumer group

3 Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

We actively recruited stakeholders from different backgrounds to contribute and discuss solutions based on their professional knowledge or personal experience. To kindle the spirit of a people's summit, we incorporated talking points requested by the participants prior to the dialogue. We organized the dialogue at a time most suitable to accommodate participants from different time-zones. Considering cultural, geographical, and language challenges, we brought together people from different backgrounds in the same discussion groups - even where perspectives and agendas may be wildly different, e.g. parent consumer and marketing manager. Since sustainability is a complex issue, it depends on many different factors, and requires action on multiple levels to be managed, we decided to look at the responsibilities of each stakeholder group in separate discussion groups, to avoid cross-sector-blaming - which often leads to inaction. We asked every participant to commit to the "practical" outcomes of the dialogue and to only bring solutions to the table that they would themselves be willing to follow through with in practice. We were transparent with participants about the outcome of the dialogues, and explained we would be taking notes according to Chatham House rules, promising to treat comments confidentially and anonymously. We told participants that we would have liked the conversation to be very spontaneous and positive, trying to build on top of each other's ideas respectfully. We also emphasized we didn't want anyone to feel that they didn't have enough expertise to contribute to the conversation - if they had been chosen to be there, it is because we wanted to hear what they had to say.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Act with urgency: We made sure that the conversation focused on the next 3-5 years and revolved around specific realistic and practical solutions. Be respectful: Everyone in the dialogue was encouraged to be respectful of others' perspectives and every friction and divergence was dealt with a constructive approach. We encouraged food production and consumption policies and practices that strive to protect and improve the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and ecosystems - while at the same time respecting local cultures and contexts. Recognise complexity: Throughout the dialogue, we always recognised that sustainability in the context of our food system is complex, and closely connected to human and animal health, land, water, climate, biodiversity, the economy, and geopolitics. We allowed and encouraged disagreement with proposed solutions and recognised that solutions likely will not be easy to implement. We recognised that solutions were needed on multiple levels, and asked participants to vote on each group's main suggested solutions. Embrace multi-stakeholder inclusivity: We facilitated conversations between members of different stakeholder groups, and ensured that everyone was always involved in the conversation and invited everyone to express themselves on each topic of discussion. Complement the work of others: We developed our own unique and relaxed style of hosting in an effort to stimulate new discussions that would lead to creative solutions. Build trust: We committed to creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere to build trust and open airing of truthful views. We created an optional shared spreadsheet where each participant could drop their personal details in case they wanted to be contacted by other participants or by us. We let participants know that we would send the final feedback report to them. Participants also know that they might be offered follow-up opportunities with FoodUnfolded to reach our audience about important issues.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

We have found that creating interactive polls during the plenary session allowed us to stimulate engagement from the very beginning of the event and to keep a higher level of attention throughout the Dialogue. Using polls also made it possible to democratically vote on the solutions that the majority of participants thought should take priority.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

The Dialogue “Sustainability: Just A Buzzword?” focused on overcoming the abstract and vast nature of the term ‘sustainability’ used in our political, industrial, academic, media and social landscapes, as a barrier to real sustainable progress. The primary goal of the Dialogue was to find common solutions to help different sectors qualify, quantify and reinforce sustainable practices and policies related to our food system.

Sustainability has been a central talking and action point across all sectors - however, the concept of sustainability is complex and multi-faceted. The absence of a common framework for what is or is not sustainable impedes the sustainable progress for all actors in our food system.

In this dialogue, we invited millennial participants from different countries and backgrounds to discuss how we can more clearly define and measure sustainability within the food system. We reflected on which frameworks we need to adopt in order to move our food system towards more sustainable practices. We focused on solutions related to the actions in five different areas : 1. Policy and Public Sector; 2. Agriculture, Business and Supply Chains; 3. Marketing and Food Labelling; 4. Research and Innovation; 5. Domestic and International Development.

1. Policy & Public Sector. This group focused on the role of policy and the public sector, to establish clear parameters around sustainability in our food system.

2. Agriculture, Business & Supply Chains. This group focused on the solutions needed in agriculture, business and supply chains to implement sustainable practices in the food system.

3. Research & Innovation. This group focused on the role of research and innovation that could help accelerate the adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices, policies, and consumer behavioural change.

4. Marketing & Food Labelling. The group focused on the role of marketing and food labelling, and what would be required in/by these sectors for sustainable smallholder development and consumer behavioural change.

5. Domestic & International Development. This group focused on the barriers and solutions needed to sustainably develop the food system in low-income or low-resource regions.

ACTION TRACKS

- ✓ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- ✓ Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- ✓ Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- ✓ Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- ✓ Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Human rights
- ✓ Women & Youth Empowerment
- ✓ Policy
- ✓ Data & Evidence
- ✓ Governance
- Trade-offs
- ✓ Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

Obstacles:

- There is a strong sense that 'sustainability' is now overused or misused in our public and private domains. This is a barrier to consumer knowledge.
- Sustainability values seem to differ between different stakeholders: governments are thought to prioritize economy over environment and social sustainability.
- There is no straight-forward solution to creating a sustainable framework. The challenge lies in the multi-faceted and complex nature of sustainability - where do we begin to qualify what is or is not sustainable?
- There is not enough (quality) dialogue between different stakeholders about sustainability. This includes lack of communication between stakeholders in the same sector (e.g. small farmers and shared knowledge) and across sectors (e.g. scientists and policymakers).
- 'Sustainability' is too politicized.
- Sustainable practices and consumption will vary by region, and sometimes fall out of the scope of rigid regulation.
- On the consumer side, there is generally a lack of education and disconnection to food production and the system, let alone sustainable food production.
- The burden of choice is currently on the consumers: consumers have to choose between more sustainable or less sustainable products. However, packaging labels on food are also too confusing, and do not always cover all the complexities of sustainability.
- For many populations, food security and poverty challenges need to first be resolved (or simultaneously) for them to begin considering environmental sustainability. There is a general lack of awareness on the concept of sustainability and its benefits in these regions.

Conclusions & Solutions:

- Most participants agreed that governments and industry have the greatest power to drive sustainable systematic change. However, all stakeholders need to engage and collaborate to make change possible.
- For this reason, policymakers must be bold and draw hard policy lines to stop unsustainable practices, while encouraging the use of sustainable methods.
- These policies need to accept variations in circumstance and flexes to account for regional differences in people's livelihoods and perspectives.
- Legislation must also be backed by solid scientific indicators. Researchers and scientists need to develop a common sustainability framework, with the metrics that capture different aspects of sustainability (e.g. water, ghg emissions, farmer income, workers wages and conditions).
- Developing sustainability frameworks also requires the collaboration and experience of different groups like Indigenous people and smallholder farmers. Data collection must then be feasible and affordable for these groups that may lack the time, resources and tools to do so.
- A stronger connection between policymakers and scientists, NGOs and the public through open access science-policy co-creation sessions is needed to create policies that reflect what truly is or is not sustainable.
- Public funding needs to be available for information brokers (e.g. science communicators) to act as communication bridges between different stakeholders.
- Financial investments and monitoring from richer countries is needed to support low-income and -resource regions in their shift to sustainable agriculture
- Although a global agenda for a sustainable food system is needed, fundamental solutions begin at the local level.
- Businesses must adopt sustainable practices in accordance with clearly defined sustainability parameters.
- Small farmers should support and learn from one another in their transition to sustainable practices. So, there needs to be greater systematic support for cooperatives.
- Tax incentives and penalties are needed, based on set sustainability metrics backed by strong research and evidence, to support and ensure farmers and businesses truly implement sustainable practices.
- Education is needed to bring consumers closer to sustainable food production at a younger age. School curriculums need to create experiences for early learners to experience where their food is from. For low-resource regions, providing school meals could be an incentive for education.
- Advertising standards for ethical marketing and labels that provide transparency on social, economic and environmental sustainability metrics.
- Labels should have procurement incentives (e.g. concrete plans towards net zero goals) for well-established businesses.
- Sustainable certifications should be made affordable and accessible to small-scale farmers.
- At the end of the Dialogue, all participants voted on the solutions that they thought should be the ones to take priority. These are: 1. Workshops and dialogues between policymakers and scientists (science-policy co-creation sessions) 2. Re-establish connection between consumers and food, including early education curriculum 3. Food labelling procurement incentives, market barriers & ethical restrictions for sustainable marketing 4. Turn sustainability from a single word into a multi-dimensional framework of metrics that captures more context, including social, ethical, environmental and economic impacts. 5. Financial incentives and monitoring from richers countries to support shift to sustainable agriculture in low-resource countries/regions

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/5

Public Sector and Policy

Participants acknowledged that there is no universal, “scientifically-approved” model, agreement or definition of sustainability. The term is very holistic, hard to quantify, misused and often time-dependent. The group recognized that the public sector is broken when it comes to creating, implementing and reinforcing sustainable policies. However, solutions and initiatives are possible both at the big and small scale and can play a huge role. For example, some participants mentioned local initiatives by municipalities in reducing meat consumption in schools in favour of organic and locally produced vegetables. The group concluded that the public sector is not very connected with the public, or even scientists and smallholder farmers, and needs to take bolder decisions towards sustainability. In other words, it is time for policymakers to take action, implement the information coming from research on sustainability and SDGs. There is a sense that policymakers listen to lobbyists from big corporations, while there should be more dialogue with scientists and more opportunities to engage and empower the consumers. The decision process at the political level is complex, fragmented and not-transparent. To overcome these barriers to sustainable progress, the participants agreed to the following solutions:

1. Information brokers (e.g. science communicators) to act as a bridge between the public sector, scientists and communities. They should be funded by the public sector ideally.
2. Science-policy co-creation sessions: Workshops and dialogues between policymakers and scientists
3. Engaging the public in open access forums, so things/decisions are more transparent and citizens have the change to understand what happens behind the scenes and decision makers will feel more accountability

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/5

Agriculture, Business and Supply Chains

In this discussion group, participants agreed that there is a general lack of communication about sustainability, as well as sustainable standards. This group strongly felt that a holistic approach is needed, which includes all stakeholders. Consumers need to be involved in the paradigm shift for more sustainable practices, as they have the biggest effect on food production through demand - however, there is a lack of education on our food system and on which practices are actually sustainable or unsustainable. There needs to be a stronger connection between consumers and farmers, as well as farmer to farmer to share best practices and sustainable knowledge. The group also acknowledged that big companies have more power to mislead in respect to sustainable practices, so businesses must actually commit to sustainable practices if the system is to make any progress. Participants agreed on the following solutions to prioritize:

Supporting cooperatives to increase small farmer visibility and give farmers more control of their prices. This provides more economic freedom and supports knowledge sharing/peer to peer learning.
For consumers to understand where food comes from and the complexities farmers face to produce food, the public sector needs to push for an education curriculum that re-establishes the connection between early learners and the food production system.
Businesses and farmers can commit to sustainable practices, so long as there are clearly defined parameters & guidelines for "sustainability" (production, processing, consumption), as well as in "green communication" (e.g. marketing)

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/5

Marketing and Food Labelling

The group recognised that marketing and food labels have an impact on consumer behaviour - which in turn affects food production. The participants agreed that the term 'sustainability' is vague and overused, creating barriers to consumer knowledge. They also acknowledged that food labels can mislead, oversimplify, 'greenwash' & fail to capture the full picture (i.e claim sustainability in some ways but not others). To limit this, there is a need for increased transparency, governance and regulation in marketing/labelling so these can be trusted by consumers. The group also agreed that achieving a sustainable food system cannot rely solely on labels/marketing: it requires a multi-pronged approach from policymakers, regulators, consumer advocacy & education. These are the main solutions identified by the participants:

1. Labels are valuable tools for communicating with consumers, but these need to be transparent, regulated and governed in order to be trusted by consumers and to create meaningful impact.
2. Labels should capture social, economical and environmental sustainability metrics.
3. Labels need to be supplemented by consumer knowledge & engagement: be it through the education sector, independent research etc.
4. Small-scale farmers should be incentivised or given affordable access to sustainable certification to dismantle barriers between small-scale farmers and consumers.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/5

Research and Innovation

This group generally agreed that a key challenge to defining 'sustainability' is that the term is used perhaps too broadly to be really useful. Since sustainability encompasses so many different factors, it can be difficult to know what aspect to measure. The participants agreed that the current economy defines 'sustainability' with carbon emissions alone, potentially ignoring other important impacts. With regard to sustainable consumption patterns, the group generally agreed that the burden is now on consumers to assess the sustainability of the things they buy, leaving companies free to use 'sustainability' to suit them. This needs to shift to companies being obliged to provide more information and context. Policies and regulation can be useful tools to legally establish sustainable metrics, but only if they are enforced, applied globally and relevant for all contexts. Innovative new uses of data (including satellite data) could help to make companies more accountable. Even if a comprehensive framework for assessing sustainability can be agreed, this will require solid metrics and accurate data collection, which could put pressure on producers. The group agreed on the following factors to consider when conceptualising 'sustainability':

'Sustainability' is defined differently depending on context, and how a person is impacted.

Decision making around sustainability tends to concentrate on individual (country) needs, but we should be thinking more globally.

'Sustainability' is best viewed as a multi-dimensional framework, with environmental, social, economic and ethical domains. It should represent the interests of communities and individuals; present and future generations; and humans and non-human organisms.

Understanding these factors, the group agreed on the following solutions:

1. Turn sustainability from a single word into a multi-dimensional framework of metrics that captures more context, including social, ethical, environmental and economic impacts.
2. Focus on finding the right ways to collect the data we need that are affordable, cheap and efficient for small producers - including innovative new approaches.
3. Move the burden of proof from consumers to companies, in a way that spans international borders and works in all contexts.
4. Co-develop metrics and policies for sustainability with communities and different interest groups.
5. Ensure that the interests of all affected parties (including future generations and non-human organisms) are listened to and taken into account during decision-making processes.
6. Make life cycle analysis (LCA) software and tools more widely available, and train companies in how to use them.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 5/5

Domestic and International Development

The participants in this group unanimously agreed that governments are key players in a more sustainable food system, because they initiate and move policies. This group mentioned several factors for real sustainable progress:

- Everyone (all stakeholders) must be involved in dialogue. This includes taking into account traditional views and practices (e.g. Indigenous practices).
- However, the concept of sustainability is being discussed in 'different languages' (e.g. in Indigenous populations it is about how you live, in some countries it is about driving an electric car, for scientists it is about quantitative measurements like emissions.). There needs to be a unification for how different stakeholders discuss sustainability.
- Solid scientific indicators for legislation are needed.
- The importance of education and communication to help all individuals of different socioeconomic backgrounds to become aware of sustainability and its benefits. One of the biggest barriers for sustainable development in low-income regions is poverty and food security. This must be addressed as a part of sustainable development.
- Additionally, poor quality Aginputs (that wouldn't meet the standards of other wealthier countries) are being sold to developing countries. This needs to be regulated at a policy-level.

The participants also agreed on the following solutions:

1. Promotion of sustainable education is needed in low-resource areas - perhaps through the incentive of free school meals.
2. Start working at the local level. There could be a global agenda, but initiatives should start at the local level.
3. Financial investments and monitoring from richer countries to shifting to sustainable agriculture.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

While participants agreed that policymakers need to work more closely with objective scientists, some participants disagreed on who should be classified as 'objective scientists' (e.g. independent or industry researchers). Some believe that if scientists are paid by the private sector, they are not 100% free and objective. Academic participants also mentioned that some researchers are not willing to speak up in the political domain, because they believe that scientists should not be activists.

Some participants mentioned the need of a multidimensional labelling to clarify whether products are sustainable at the social, environmental level or both. Other participants pointed out that such certifications would make the products more expensive, and less accessible. Certifications also create a binary choice between what product is more sustainable and less sustainable (even if both options may not be sustainable). Some participants believe this is necessary to progress the food system towards more sustainable products, while others believe that the burden should not be with the consumer to choose between sustainable/unsustainable products, but that all products should have a sustainable baseline.

Several participants questioned the effectiveness of labels in creating real, meaningful impact. The reasons for this were twofold: 1. Consumers may not prioritise buying 'sustainable' over other factors such as price and taste; 2. Due to widespread greenwashing, consumers may doubt the truthfulness of labels and therefore disregard them. Two participants in particular defended the value of labels and marketing, viewing it as a vital platform to reach, educate and engage consumers. For several participants, labels were not considered the answer - policy and regulations should lead the way.

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CORRECTIONS, ADJUSTMENTS, OR CHANGES

Title SUSTAINABILITY - JUST A BUZZWORD OUTCOMES MANIFESTO

Date 07/07/2021

Array

ATTACHMENTS

- **SUSTAINABILITY_ JUST A BUZZWORD OUTCOMES MANIFESTO**
https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Sustainability_UN_Summary_Manifesto_scaled-scaled.jpg