

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Tuesday, 22 June 2021 15:00 GMT +08:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Nourishing Southeast Asia in a post-COVID 19 world: scaling nutrition and food security research for food systems transformation
CONVENED BY	Yurdi Yasmi, Regional Representative for Southeast Asia, IRRI
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/24051/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste

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

144

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

44

19-30

61

31-50

34

51-65

4

66-80

1

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

60 Male

82 Female

2 Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

52 Agriculture/crops

13 Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

Agro-forestry

3 Environment and ecology

1 Trade and commerce

53 Education

Communication

Food processing

Food retail, markets

Food industry

2 Financial Services

1 Health care

3 Nutrition

6 National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

10 Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

1 Small/medium enterprise/artisan

2 Large national business

2 Multi-national corporation

2 Small-scale farmer

1 Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

3 Local Non-Governmental Organization

6 International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

86 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

1 Local authority

15 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

1 United Nations

1 International financial institution

14 Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

9 Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

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

Registration was opened to various sectors and countries across the region. To address the issue of limited discussion time and potential technical difficulties contingent to online events, guide questions were included in the registration process so that participant views are documented in case they are unable to contribute to the session. A summary of these responses were reported in the breakout sessions. Additionally, a mixed group of participants were assigned to the breakout sessions so that different perspectives on the same topic would be reflected.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Diversity and inclusion were key considerations in selecting the keynote speakers and sectoral respondents for the public forum.

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

Even in a virtual setting, broadening geographic scope will pose several challenges to ensuring inclusivity. It is important to provide additional opportunities for providing feedback as necessary.

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

COVID-19 has exposed vulnerabilities in the agri-food system, which further threatens the nutrition and food security of already vulnerable groups. Building resilience is key and this entails exploring innovative solutions and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Research will be crucial in informing policy decisions and future directions for food systems transformation, and the agricultural sector joins the movement to reformulate a shared vision of future food systems, anchored on socio-economic and health inclusiveness to ensure that no one is left behind.

This Independent Food Systems Dialogue aimed to bring together a range of stakeholders across the food system -- from producers to value chain actors, consumers and policymakers -- to respond to the challenge of nourishing Southeast Asia in a post-COVID 19 context. Specifically, the dialogue aimed to address these three questions:

- 1) What areas of food and nutrition security need to be addressed and who are the stakeholders that need to be involved in the research, development, investment, and deployment process? What are the barriers to innovation uptake?
- 2) How can policymakers efficiently access research that can help inform the development of data-driven and evidence-based policies? What mechanisms should be in place to monitor, evaluate, and feedback results?
- 3) What investment support is needed to strengthen food systems transformation? How can we make access to resources more equitable to vulnerable and underserved sectors?

The Dialogue consisted of two parts: an agenda-setting online public forum that serves as a conversation starter and ceremonial call to action, and a smaller private breakout session where key stakeholders can further discuss these ideas in depth.

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

Initial context setting recognized the challenges and opportunities that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic disruptions caused by restricted mobility amplified the social inequities of vulnerable sectors, and raised concerns about rising food insecurity and its consequences on nutrition in a region where the multiple forms of malnutrition continue to be a prevalent public health concern. The agriculture sector suffered its share of setbacks, but may have proven more resilient than other industries, such as tourism. Regional cooperation reduced the early disruptions to agricultural trade, and opportunities arose from changing consumer behavior and the rapid pivot to digital platforms, and a demographic shift from urban to rural locations could impact future agricultural labor practices and initiatives.

Food Systems champions were invited to give their perspectives on how to catalyze food systems transformation in order to meet regional food and nutrition security goals in a post-COVID-19 context. The first champion, Dr. Shakuntala Thilsted of WorldFish, drew lessons from her experience in shifting mindsets on nutrition and aquaculture and how this can be applied to revisiting rice as a part of sustainable healthy diets. Diversity is a crucial element of change: in terms of solutions needed for diversifying diets, but also in perspectives engaged. Elevating the role and visibility of underrepresented sectors like women, youth and indigenous peoples throughout the research, development and deployment process would help contextualize global agendas into local solutions. Good quality data is necessary, and care must be exercised to ensure that the data provided does not mask inequalities and lead to mismatched policy priorities. Policy interventions must also be guided by a food systems approach, bringing in multiple disciplines and providing multiple pathways to address solutions.

The second champion, Dr. Glenn Gregorio of SEARCA, viewed food systems transformation from the perspective of improving the agricultural research and development pipeline of technology generators, adopters, and end-users. By strengthening the academe-industry-government linkages through research collaboration and co-sharing of resources, the delivery of innovation from research to market can be expedited. Identified priority areas include: developing well planned local food production systems, improving fintech and investments in agriculture-adjacent sectors to sustain the growing interest in agripreneurship, and—from a regional cooperation perspective—striking a balance between trade priorities and food security. These science-based solutions must be underpinned by an understanding of Southeast Asian cultures and lifestyle in order to be sustained and scaled up.

Sectoral responses provided multiple entry points on how food systems can be transformed. Representatives from the farming sector underscored the importance of social safety nets and access to financial mechanisms to ensure resilience from external shocks, while advocating for the promotion of sustainable and healthy consumption among consumers so that production processes in support of this advocacy will be profitable to farmers. A younger farmer-entrepreneur echoed the need for a supportive ecosystem to encourage the youth to engage in agriculture, and noted that transformation begins with habits, mindset, and culture.

Two key policy recommendations were presented by the development sector representative: diversifying agri-food commodities to meet market demand, with a focus on food and nutrition, safety and quality; and greening and enhancing resilience of investments, with a focus on pricing environmental services and establishing incentive mechanisms.

From the perspective of the value chain actors, profitability, demand creation and sustainability must be addressed in order to engender food systems transformation for people and planet. Sustainable crop production practices and market inclusiveness must be encouraged, and an evidence base must be developed for an enabling policy environment.

These findings were discussed in further detail in the breakout sessions that followed (see succeeding responses).

To close the opening forum, convenors reiterated the need to restructure food systems towards delivering healthier diets, economies, and environment through a holistic food-land-water approach and repurposing public support for agriculture to prioritize nutrition, deliver public goods like research and extension, and reduce market distortions and inefficiencies to ensure meaningful and equitable participation in the agri-food system.

What is apparent from the conversations that took place is that all stakeholders understood the urgency of transforming food systems and the collaborative action necessary for change. They also highlighted the importance of building the resilience of food systems for future shocks and changes. Based on the identified priorities and proposed solutions, it was also clear that sustainable and inclusive transformation can and should take place at multiple levels and timescales, with some sectors and stakeholders focusing on short-term goals, while others can appropriately address medium- and long-term benefits.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

Breakout Session 1 focused on food and nutrition research areas, stakeholders that need to be engaged, and barriers to innovation uptake. It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic response is a learning experience that can drive food systems transformation. It exposed inequalities inherent in the current food system, and underscored the importance of proper nutrition and good health in maintaining quality of life. An increased interest in food and nutrition security was demonstrated through the broad scope of suggested research areas spanning across the agri-food system (albeit mostly dependent on the participants' expertise). Common themes include sustainability, value chain upgrading, availability and access to more nutritious food crops, a focus on aquaculture, and consumer research. Two parallel pathways for improving access to nutritious foods were presented: 1) improving the nutritive value of staple crops like rice, and 2) diversifying farm systems in order to diversify the food on consumers' plates.

Identified stakeholders were also spread out across the value chain: what was emphasized was the importance of acknowledging the different views, concerns and perspectives of producers, value chain actors, consumers at all stages of the program cycle.

Barriers to innovation uptake were identified at the individual level: resistance to change or lack of acceptance among end-users, as well as insufficient financial capability—and at the institutional level, or the lack of an enabling environment or policy support for nutrition-related innovations. While poor knowledge, understanding or skills were identified as underlying factors, a lack of understanding on the part of program implementers about the social, cultural, behavioural factors of end-users was also acknowledged and the need for more participatory dialogue mechanisms was presented as a possible solution. Lack of evidence was also presented as a barrier: for as long as innovation has demonstrable benefits for its intended end-users, uptake will not be an issue.

Participants acknowledged the importance of changing mindsets from “feeding to nourishing” to prioritize nutritive value over yield, and from “short-term to long-term” to emphasize more sustainable pathways to achieving nutrition and public health goals. This entails social and behavior change, which would require the participation of communication- and culture-focused stakeholders such as extension workers and social scientists, as well as “non-traditional” stakeholders such as designers and members of the creative sector, in food systems transformation.

A roadmap to a sustainable food system should be collaboratively developed by agriculture, nutrition, health sectors, with clear targets, commitments, and accountability measures. This would help pivot towards a food systems mindset and adopt a more holistic understanding of how nutritious food is produced and consumed in a safe and sustainable manner.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

Breakout Session 2 focused on the research-policy interface, and what needs to be done to ensure the development and implementation of evidence-based policies. Multiple gaps were identified in the process of translating research into policy, beginning with the disconnect between the available evidence base and the intended outcomes that policymakers want to address. This was understood to be primarily a lack of access to data, though it could in some instances refer to a lack of relevant research for specific concerns, which points to the need to strengthen implementation of national research agendas. The issue of access to data is multi-faceted, ranging from lack of infrastructure widening the digital gap, the need to consolidate evidence into relevant open-access dashboards or platforms, to the comprehensibility of the presented data. Data quality is perceived to be important, and the need to independently validate data was raised. Streamlining bureaucratic processes was also identified as a barrier for evidence-based policies, particularly in the context of accessing and adopting the latest technologies such as gene editing. Some feedback was also provided on the nature of research—bringing in cross-sectoral expertise to provide the necessary cultural and social contexts, and the value of effective feedback mechanisms in generating quality evidence.

Effective communication, lobbying and interfacing between research and policy is necessary. There is a perceived lack of information sharing from sectors involved in research (whether from academia, research institutes, or the private sector) and the need to have a regular platform for knowledge exchange or research dissemination was identified as a possible solution. Extending the conversation to the public sphere – through traditional or social media – was also viewed as a viable way for policymakers to be made aware of relevant research.

Putting these recommendations into action would entail a baseline understanding and alignment among researchers and policymakers of their respective processes and languages. Researchers should be aware of which key areas are policy priorities, the types of evidence policymakers need and how these should be presented, while policymakers should be aware of the research process, the appropriate timeframes and success indicators, and how these can feed into the development of realistic outcomes that policy changes can help address.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

Breakout Session 3 focused on sustainable investment and ensuring inclusive access to resources. Two investment tracks emerged during the discussion: 1) a focus on production systems (affordable, adaptable and profitable inputs and technologies, and/or more efficient value chains) that provide tangible benefits to investors and end-users; and 2) a more transformative approach that incentivizes investments with long-term sustainability impact despite little immediate benefit. These include nature-based solutions and natural resource management, and ensuring the equitable participation of underserved sectors in the agri-food system.

Another investment area considered was communication, in terms of infrastructure and as an extension service/activity, as a means to bridge the digital and information gap and enable grassroots end-users to make informed choices about investments or access resources for their livelihoods.

Multi-stakeholder engagement was underscored throughout the discussion: as a top-down approach with government-industry-academe partnerships; and from the bottom-up, where grassroots stakeholders are empowered to participate in identifying and developing solutions for their community and financial mechanisms, project planning, and investment opportunities are devolved to local government units. Innovative financing instruments such as impact bonds and blended finance were viewed as potential tools for increasing investments from the private sector; it was also suggested that new investors should be cultivated from the younger generation.

Strengthening the enabling environment was also emphasized: developing investment criteria and governance mechanisms, and ensuring that supportive legal instruments for sustainable investments are in place.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Complementary pathways towards food systems transformation emerged during the discussion, particularly in the sessions on food and nutrition security research and in sustainable investments.

Improving access to nutritious foods can be approached in two ways: by improving the nutritive value of staple crops like rice, and by diversifying production in order to diversify the food that consumers can afford to eat. These approaches are intended to improve market access, making it profitable for producers and other value chain actors, and affordable for consumers. Prioritizing research on production, whether on staples or diversified crops, would benefit from adding a lens on consumer research: understanding their knowledge, attitudes, and practices in order to shift behavior towards healthier food choices.

Stakeholders involved in investments approached the issue of sustainability in two ways. First, by focusing on production systems that provide tangible benefits to investors and end-users; and then via a more transformative approach that incentivizes broader sustainability impact within a longer timescale. These pathways generally align with short- and long-term views on food systems transformation, and can be implemented in parallel if there is coordination and collaboration among the relevant sectors.

It was generally agreed that grassroots sectors should be prioritized in investments, but different entry points were identified for their inclusion. Streamlining existing mechanisms—making value chains more efficient, improving access to information, technology, and finance—can facilitate meaningful participation. However, it is important to note that participants working at or with local communities suggested the increased involvement of grassroots sectors in identifying their needs and planning, implementing, and scaling solutions, as well as in developing the evidence base that can be used to inform policy recommendations.

The urgency and complexity of food systems transformation underscores the need to consider multiple perspectives and pathways.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Link to online public forum**
<https://fb.watch/6sSyLE6ml6/>