

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Tuesday, 13 July 2021 17:00 GMT +02:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	A Small Business Agenda for the Food Systems Summit
CONVENED BY	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Agri-Food Network; International Chamber of Commerce
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/24692/
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

135

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

31-50

51-65

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Male

Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

Agriculture/crops

Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

Agro-forestry

Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

Education

Communication

Food processing

Food retail, markets

Food industry

Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

Local Non-Governmental Organization

International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

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

The dialogue was organised with full respect and commitment to the Principles of Engagement: Act with Urgency In light of this urgency, the Dialogue was organized as a contribution to the Food Systems Summit and to the elaboration of pathways to food systems transformation contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Commit to the Summit The Dialogue empowered stakeholders to participate in the preparation of the Food Systems Summit. All stakeholders were consulted about ways to move forward collectively and creatively, embracing the entire scope of opinions. The dialogue was organised around 2 main discussions which happened in small sub-groups to allow the most participative and safe open-discussions. Be Respectful Respect for one another is a foundation for genuine Dialogue. Participants in the Dialogues listened to each other and were open to the co-existence of divergent points of view. Each sub-group was facilitated by experienced facilitators who ensured everyone had an opportunity to express his/her opinions. Recognize Complexity Dialogues are an opportunity to embrace the complexity of food systems. They promote a systemic approach by involving multiple stakeholders to identify actions across the system together with potential synergies and trade-offs. Embrace multi-stakeholder inclusivity The Dialogue brought to the table a diversity of stakeholders from within SMEs, Ecosystem Support Organisations (ESOs), the broader business community, small-holder farmers and civil society – working across the food system from production to consumption. Complement the work of others The Dialogue built-on and added-value to existing policy processes and initiatives. It provided an opportunity to share promising innovations, connect stakeholders, and broaden partnerships to transform food systems for the common good. Build Trust The Dialogue was curated and facilitated in a way which created a “safe space” and promoted trust, encouraging mutual respect. The conclusions emerging from the Dialogue are not attributed to single individuals.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The dialogue used small groups to engage each participant directly in the creation of an SME Pledge for the Food Systems Summit, taking into account their diversity but presenting a united voice.

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

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 UN Food Systems Summit asked Wasafiri Consulting to engage SMEs all around the world to answer one big question – How to boost their role in providing good food for all? More than 2500 entrepreneurs completed a survey, with representation from 135 countries. Most of those entrepreneurs also went on to submit entries to the Summit’s Best Small Business competition where we heard more depth about their stories. We ran 11 dialogues in 7 languages with over 1000 participants, plus many of the other summit dialogues explored issues related to small businesses. Dozens of experts provided insights, and we undertook a comprehensive literature review with the help of FAO.

The focus of the dialogue was to present the findings of the Draft Report “A Small Business Agenda for the Food Systems Summit” which synthesised results of all that effort. The report highlights the essential role that SMEs must play in strengthening food systems, the constraints they face in elevating their positive impact, and offer recommended pathways to boost their contribution. The desired outcome of the dialogue was a joint statement presenting a collective SME voice to put forward to the pre-Summit and to continuing gathering endorsement up until the Summit in September.

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

Whilst they may individually be small, SMEs manage at least half of the multi trillion-dollar global food economy. Often overlooked, we have come to understand these SMEs as hidden heroes, who tirelessly ensure food gets on our tables, and collectively they have enormous influence over the future of food. They are also quiet revolutionaries, passionately pioneering better food in every corner of the world – whether that means making our food more nourishing, more sustainable, more equitable or more resilient. We learned that SMEs are change-makers in five different ways.

Firstly, they integrate markets, strengthening supply chains where they are weakest. Most obviously they are linking smallholder farmers to markets, and in doing so provide services that improve farm productivity and profitability. Evidence clearly shows that this market integration reduces poverty and hunger, especially in rural areas where it is most persistent. Secondly, food SMEs create opportunities that improve equity. There is something about the universal nature of food that makes it an economic gateway for women, for youth, for indigenous and minority groups. These groups are a higher proportion of entrepreneurs and employees within food SMEs than you would expect compared to the average business in any country.

Thirdly, SMEs are innovators, pioneering and scaling solutions for nutrition and sustainability – from zero-waste packaging, to alternative proteins, to regenerative farming practices. Often their role is to tap into known technology or business models, but then they make these work in a very specific context where they have nuanced understanding and local connections.

Fourthly, they embody resilience. The SME response to COVID showed us that emphatically. Embedded within communities and landscapes, they have no option but to deal with shocks. But they are agile enough to pivot their business models and sustain services in the toughest of situations.

Finally, SMEs and especially the entrepreneurs who run them, are influencers. Passionate about their products, their customers, their land, their staff, they are constantly advocating for better food and they are close enough and trusted enough to be changing hearts and minds all across our food systems.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

The first pathway focuses on simply creating a business ecosystem in which food SMEs thrive. The food sector is often burdensome for SMEs. Running a food SME is hard, and market elements are frequently wrong-sized for them. When food entrepreneurs have a business environment which gives them a fair chance to compete in the market, they then thrive to the benefit of consumers, producers, communities, nature, and investors. We heard numerous opportunities for cross-sector actors to strengthen the business ecosystem for food SMEs.

- We must reduce the cost of doing business for food SMEs. This includes improving physical and digital infrastructure, regulations, and the ensuring rule of law.
- We must improve access to finance, which was by far the most common request by SMEs who felt financial products rarely met their needs.
- Governments can ease the graduation of informal businesses into the formal sector.
- At their best, large market actors like supermarkets or governments, can use their buying power to lift small businesses, by intentionally sourcing from and supporting them.
- And lastly, we can target business support at food SMEs through initiatives like incubators and offering business development services.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

The second pathway aims to incentivise businesses to provide “Good Food for All”

The best businesses are not always the most competitive, so they struggle to scale up. Most consumers currently prioritise price above all other factors, and good businesses cannot out-compete those who deliver their products whilst externalising their cost to public health, natural capital, or social equity. The food system will continue to fail us until these incentives change.

Here, cross-sector actors also have opportunities to act:

- We must ensure prices reflect the true cost of food, while also safeguarding the affordability of food to poor consumers. The Summit’s Scientific Group has an excellent paper on how this might be achieved.
- There is cultural shift required to create consumer demand for “good food”. Until we value food for how it nurtures the health of our bodies, our landscapes and our communities; then the preference for cheap calories will dominate market signals.
- Lastly, fast-track the innovative entrepreneurs that promise positive disruption of our food systems. The ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship is essential to the pace of change needed over the next decade.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

The third and last pathway addresses an underlying issue. We must increase the power of food SMEs within sector planning. Small businesses have quiet and isolated voices. Compared to government or large businesses, they are relatively under-powered in their ability to collectively influence decision-making, regulations, resource allocation, and cultural values within food systems. Only once power dynamics change can we expect to make progress on rebalancing food systems in favour of the SMEs pioneering good food for all. This is especially true for the women entrepreneurs and those from other marginalised groups who both face additional barriers and are some of the most fervent champions of change.

Again, there are clear opportunities to act to address this power dynamic.

- Cross-sector actors must all elevate the voice of SMEs. Make sure they are consulted as, for example regulations get changed, as sector programmes get designed, or financial products are taken to market.
- Then, help structure SMEs into dynamic networks. In places like Belgium, where food SMEs organise together, they are better able to influence and respond to national planning.
- Finally, and this is really a cross-cutting issue, plan and invest in food SMEs according to their context-specific priorities. The changes needed by entrepreneurs in Singapore versus Tanzania, or indeed in those in alternative proteins versus regenerative livestock, are different.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

ACTION TRACKS

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KEYWORDS

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Finance | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy |
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| | <input type="checkbox"/> Environment and Climate |

ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

ATTACHMENTS

- **SME Pledge for the Food Systems Summit**
<https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SME-pledge-UNFSS-1.pdf>
- **Small Business Agenda for the Food Systems Summit**
https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/unfss-small_business_agenda.pdf

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Small Business Agenda dialogue recording**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15AzgXKNJKI>