

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Friday, 9 July 2021 18:00 GMT +02:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Lifestyle Changes towards Sustainable Food Systems
CONVENED BY	John Busuttil, Director Global Issues, Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs - Malta
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/39816/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Member State
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	Malta

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

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

5	0-18	17	19-30	20	31-50	15	51-65	5	66-80		80+
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PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

27	Male	30	Female		Prefer not to say or Other
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

3	Agriculture/crops	5	Education	5	Health care
	Fish and aquaculture		Communication	4	Nutrition
	Livestock	1	Food processing	11	National or local government
	Agro-forestry		Food retail, markets		Utilities
5	Environment and ecology	2	Food industry		Industrial
2	Trade and commerce		Financial Services		Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

	Small/medium enterprise/artisan	3	Workers and trade union
	Large national business	1	Member of Parliament
	Multi-national corporation		Local authority
1	Small-scale farmer	10	Government and national institution
	Medium-scale farmer		Regional economic community
	Large-scale farmer		United Nations
5	Local Non-Governmental Organization		International financial institution
	International Non-Governmental Organization		Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
	Indigenous People	4	Consumer group
3	Science and academia		Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

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

Malta recognised the need to heed the UN Secretary General's call to hold a Food Systems Summit National Dialogue. As a first step the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs recognised the complexity of food systems by prioritising the involvement of a wide range of sectors in order to organise a multi-stakeholder national dialogue. In preparation for the National Dialogue four inter-Ministerial preparatory meetings were held to ensure that the dialogue was held on a solid basis and in accordance with the UN Food Systems Summit Principles of Engagement and to foster the necessary trust and mutual respect between all stakeholders. A concept note for the Dialogue with a set of questions was developed. To enhance multi-stakeholder inclusivity participation was extended to members from the private sector and civil society. The invitation was also circulated on social media and everyone had the opportunity to register and participate.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The dialogue was forward-looking and highlighted the needs of Maltese society to improve its relationship with food systems. In line with the 2030 SDG agenda and the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit, this dialogue helped us to identify possible approaches which we need to adopt, in order to achieve national sustainable food systems by 2030. This was one of a number of steps in Malta's national efforts to enhance understanding and cooperation between different stakeholders, with a view to converge the perspectives of all stakeholders into a collective action which shall be guided by the National Pathway which Malta is developing based on the outcome of the National Dialogue.

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

Our advice is that the dialogue should be well prepared, with consultations progressively including a wide range of relevant stakeholders. In particular, we highlight the need to actively involve young farmers, food producers and the food business sector. Young farmers are a key component of our food system and more efforts are necessary to raise awareness and appreciation for the farmer's role. Farmers need to be supported and more importantly empowered to be part of our solution to establish a healthier and more sustainable relationship with food systems.

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 focused on Action Track 1 (ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all) and Action Track 2 (shift to sustainable consumption patterns). The starting point of the dialogue was that the incidence of child obesity in Malta is very high. In this regard, the dialogue addressed the needs of consumers in terms of accessibility, availability and affordability of healthy food for children and the actions that the Government, relevant stakeholders, and citizens as advocates and consumers can take to make healthy food for children more accessible, available and affordable.

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

MAIN FINDINGS

The National Childhood Obesity Prevalence Study (2017) showed that 40% of children between the ages of 4.7 and 17 years were overweight or obese, with a tendency for obesity to peak in 5-8 year olds. This does not augur well, since a study conducted in 2016 found that around 70% of adults in Malta are either overweight or obese.

Recent evidence shows that the major contributor of obesity are poor eating habits characterised by the consumption of highly processed food, which is high in sugar and fat and thus considered very palatable. These foods also increase the risk for tooth decay, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease, amongst others.

A National Health Literacy survey in 2014 showed that the level of nutrition knowledge had increased, yet individuals were still refraining from opting for healthy choices.

The recent National Food Consumption Survey (2018, unpublished) shows that the vegetable and the dietary fibre intake is significantly low, such that the nation needs to double its intake. In contrast, fat and sugar need to be reduced significantly. A pilot study on foods for infants aged between 6-36 months showed that only 36% of tested food products met the nutritional standard criteria set by the WHO.

Research confirms that children's diets are normally restricted to around 15 foods (study year). What is worrying is that children may not be consuming a balanced diet due to this limitation and often they are not pushed to try new food. It was noted that when teenagers prepare their own meals, they are more likely to establish a healthy relationship with food.

The National Breakfast Club Initiative implemented by the Education Department in state schools, has been running since 2014. It provides all school children who apply with an opportunity to have a free healthy nutritious breakfast in a secure environment before school starts. Furthermore, vulnerable children from deprived backgrounds are also provided with a free healthy packed lunch daily.

Ironically, despite the fact that fresh produce and other food is available the demand is low. People often resort to buying from supermarkets and other outlets for convenience, and these retail outlets typically carry more imported food products, even vegetables, fruit and fresh cheese or dairy items. If the demand for fresh produce increases, farmers have the capacity and will be encouraged to produce more. Currently, the cheaper price of imported frozen food is affecting the consumers' purchasing decisions.

Malta is witnessing the impacts of desertification. A lack of rainwater is contributing to soil erosion and so does the lack of worked soil. The ocean is also being impacted as it is becoming more acidic which in turn affects the sustainability of the seafood chain. Security of our food systems is being threatened by climate change.

In 2020 the Government published for public consultation the Long-term Waste Management Plan, which has a strong focus on food waste prevention and management. Malta has worked on several educational and structural campaigns on environmental issues targeting the general public or even schoolchildren. Perhaps it is time to initiate campaigns which target the corporate industry.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

1. Main challenges for a sustainable food system in Malta

It is necessary to make the healthy food choices, the natural and easy choice for both adults and children. Since highly-processed or ultra-processed foods are typically nutrient-poor foods which are high in saturated and trans-fats, sugar, refined grains, refined starch and salt, it is crucial to ensure that healthy and wholesome food is easily accessible, available and affordable.

A key factor that needs to be addressed is eating behaviour. Schools have an obligation to ensure that our young generation have access to healthy sustainable food. The education level within households can also lead to better eating behaviours. It is imperative to educate children at a young age to ensure that they adopt healthy eating practices, through positive attitudes and valuation and by motivating change with the adults in their household.

For the industry to go down a route of developing and producing nutrient dense foods instead of high energy food, there must be a demand for such products. Industry can reformulate existing products, however this is a costly exercise which would need to cater for the interest of the brand by retaining the current high quality, appearance and organoleptic properties of the product intact. It is pointless to develop a healthier product if the demand is not there. Therefore it is important to create a demand for healthier foods and adoption of active lifestyles. Food labelling is also a factor which needs to be revisited so that consumers' healthier food choices are facilitated.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

2. What are the actions that Government can take in making healthy food for children more accessible, available, and affordable?

The Government is currently drafting a national policy on food systems in their entirety. This will necessarily involve stakeholders from along the food supply, production, consumption and disposal chain in order to clarify needs for healthy, sustainable dietary patterns and discuss practical strategies and solutions for meeting these needs in the short-, medium- and long-term.

It is necessary to support farmers by ensuring that they have access to land, equipment, technical knowledge, the market and finance. In addition, it is important to identify areas where the government can assist farmers and food producers to help them manage and mitigate the impact of climate change.

Health campaigns have a pivotal role to positively influence families to adopt healthier food options as part of their everyday lifestyle. Children need nutritious food from a young age and adult 'gatekeepers' (parents, relatives, school communities) have a critical role in educating about food and creating an environment conducive to healthy eating. It is crucial for our educational programmes to address current and future needs by also enabling children to fully understand the interconnectedness between food, health and the environment.

At the same time, we need to towards a society where the right food decisions are easy to make. Examples of possible solutions include: moving less healthy snacks away from the checkout aisles at supermarkets (where they are often a temptation to young children and adults alike); assisting sport groups, scouts, youth and catechism centres to promote healthy eating through facilitating hands-on cooking sessions and subsidising vending machines with healthier food items; providing low-income families with vouchers which can only be redeemed to buy fresh produce or to buy directly from local farmers or fisherfolk. Authorities should make sure that food is produced as sustainably as possible, and that it is produced in line with animal welfare standards. If farmers are promoted to sell their products on their property, more people will be encouraged to directly support the local community by buying fresh food directly from the farm. Furthermore, this will also enable children to understand where food comes from and to appreciate the process through which food goes from farm to fork.

The linkages between physical health, obesity and exercise, also highlight the importance of facilitating physical activity and the availability of open, green spaces. Both informational and structural efforts towards the promotion of shifting from a sedentary to a more active lifestyle should be pushed across all age groups by the state and also non-state entities.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

3. Choosing a healthier lifestyle: the Path towards a sustainable food system by 2030

As a society it is paramount to move away from a dietary pattern laden with highly- or ultra- processed food and towards a more balanced Mediterranean Diet – style pattern. It is crucial to invest in young people, not only through food, nutrition and Home Economics education as an entitlement throughout compulsory schooling and even beyond, but also by improving the nutritional quality of the local food products designed for children and adolescents. There is a need to overcome the physical and psychological distance between what is on the plate and the sources of our food. Children frequently do not have a clear concept of where their food is coming from and therefore this aspect needs to be addressed through in-class and onsite education.

Consumers must be empowered to value sustainable and healthy food choices and behaviours. Through the upcoming national policy on food systems Malta needs to work on strategies which prioritise the needs of the consumers within a sustainable production/consumption framework and to adopt a system which is more conducive to healthier food decisions. Through the ongoing Pitkalija (fruit and vegetable market) Reform, Malta has launched a Food Agency which is expected to adopt measures and mechanisms which safeguard our food systems while promoting the consumption of local produce. Food products should be labelled in a way which makes it easy for customers to identify the healthier and local options. This labelling could perhaps also be extended to restaurant menus. Simultaneously, due to high temperatures in Malta, it is necessary to invest in better storage capacity to keep products fresh keeping in mind safety and consumer appeal.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Rather than having areas of divergence, one of the things that came out of the dialogue was that there are different possible approaches to changing the food systems in ways that serve the health and nutrition interests of consumers, whilst safeguarding the natural environment. On one hand, we know that industry is well equipped to reformulate food and to invest in R&D to develop healthy products; however, unless this is done in response to a demand by consumers, businesses risk losing profits. Another view was that there are areas where food products can be reformulated with long-term positive outcomes; for example, in the case of infant foods. Here, industry has an opportunity to influence the taste buds and the eating habits of children right from the very start, so it should lead by example and not wait for incentives. In general, it was agreed that there is a need to make healthy food more accessible and more affordable, so it becomes easier and cheaper for consumers to make the right food choices.

Simultaneously, efforts to influence consumer valorisation of local, fresh, seasonal produce, seafood and less processed food items need to be ongoing, through different media and targeting different age groups. Although food labelling is one tool that would help consumers to value and choose healthy options, this area is still an issue of debate even at European level, and we are far from reaching consensus and, more importantly, harmonisation of standards, which is the only way to ensure a level playing field for businesses in different sectors of food production. Furthermore, since Malta relies heavily on imported food, it would also be necessary to ensure that guidance on voluntary adoption or even legislation for a food labelling policy would not discriminate between local and international products.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

ATTACHMENTS

- <https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UNFSS-draft-official-feedback-form-FINAL-002.docx>