



# Questions & Answers about the Member State Food Systems Summit Dialogues

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## Introduction

This series of questions and answers is designed to provide both information and guidance to all who are interested in the Food Systems Summit Member State Dialogues programme. This is a living document and is updated regularly, with new questions (and answers) added and clearly demarcated by date. Readers are invited to submit comments and any additional questions to [info@summitdialogues.org](mailto:info@summitdialogues.org) with replies provided as quickly as possible. If a question and answer is added to this series, the questioner's identity will only be visible if specifically requested.

## What are food systems?

Food systems touch every aspect of human existence. Every person in our world depends on them functioning and all of us have a part to play. Food systems<sup>1</sup> encompass every person and every process involved in growing, raising or making food, right through to consumption; from farmers to fruit pickers to supermarket cashiers, flourmills to refrigerated trucks to neighbourhood composting facilities. They include both the broad range of these stakeholder groups who are together involved in feeding a population, and their interconnected activities. These include the growing, harvesting, packing, processing, distributing, selling, storing, marketing, consuming, and disposing of food.

Amongst these multiple stakeholders, are many sectors of government which also shape food systems. They include agriculture, water, energy, infrastructure, transport, financial services, information and technology. The world too in all its aspects is involved: natural resources, the environment, the economy, the preferences of people, culture, indigenous knowledge, policies, politics, trade, regulations, and beyond all influence how these systems operate.

Many of the world's current food systems need urgently to change – for the good of people, of the environment and climate, and of our shared future. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed vulnerabilities and inequalities in our food systems, in varying degrees for every nation across the globe. Both the virus and measures adopted to limit its impact actively threaten the lives and livelihoods of groups of people around the world. This is particularly the case for vulnerable people and those who live in fragile contexts. Although the pandemic has brought these issues to light, even before the onset of the current crisis, the need for change was evident and severe.

Problems within food systems are disparate, far-reaching and often complex. Despite there being more food produced in our world than ever before, there are still 690 million people hungry and almost 2 billion people are overweight or obese. The incidence of food related diseases is growing and nearly half of all deaths in children under 5 years old are attributable to undernutrition. Poor nutrition in a child's life can lead to stunted growth, which impairs cognitive ability and reduces school and work performance. By coming together to tackle these vital issues, we can all contribute to a world in which no one is hungry, no one is poor, and no one is left behind.

## What are the Member State FSSDs?

The UN Secretary-General's Food Systems Summit is due to take place in September 2021. In advance of the Summit, Member States are encouraged to explore pathways towards sustainable food systems so that in the coming decade they fully align with all 17 of the

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<sup>11</sup> For additional information see the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 website: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/food-systems-Summit-2021/>

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. This will mean examining, and then building on, existing food and agriculture policies and plans using a broad systems perspective. To move ahead with shaping and developing the national pathway towards sustainable food systems in the months before the Summit, Member States are invited to bring together different stakeholders from within national food systems to contribute. They are encouraged to organize and curate a programme of progressive multi-stakeholder Dialogues- the Food Systems Summit Member State Dialogues - ideally in at least three stages, both nationally and sub-nationally.

## **How will Member States be invited to organize FSSDs?**

The UN Deputy Secretary General, Chair of the Advisory Committee of the Food Systems Summit, will invite each Member State to engage in the preparation of the Summit, in order to move ahead with shaping their national pathway towards sustainable food systems. The invitation has been sent in a communication to each Member State, in November 2020.

Each Member State is encouraged to launch a programme of progressive national Food Systems Summit Dialogues (FSSDs) in three stages. The first stage will start in November 2020 with a view to the third stage being completed before June 2021

## **What is expected to emerge from the FSSDs?**

The expected outcomes of the Member State Dialogues include a pathway for the transformation of national food systems for the coming decade, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and opportunities to bring it to life with practices, policies, actions and commitments. The pathway is intended to guide work towards enabling national food systems to be sustainable, in ways that contribute to all the SDGs. It is for the authorities and actors in the Member State to decide on the direction and ambition of this pathway and how to operationalize the priority actions. It is likely that the national pathway will draw on existing national policies, plans and programmes that will have the greatest impact on the achievement of the desired future vision, and will reflect the experiences, innovations and proposals that emerge within the different stages of the national Dialogues. It will also consider how it will be possible to assess progress towards the desired future vision, as well as who needs to be involved in getting there and what kinds of challenges will need to be navigated along the way. Stakeholder groups will be encouraged to determine and indicate the extent to which they plan to support the changes in food systems that are anticipated in the pathway.

There will also be opportunities for national stakeholder groups to reflect on the propositions emerging from the Summit workstreams - especially the Scientific Group and Action Tracks - and to contribute to them on their basis of local and national experience. Member states will also be able to connect with and consider the workstreams and pathways of others engaged with the Summit.

## **What difference will the Member State Food Systems Summit Dialogues make?**

Through the FSSDs, various stakeholder groups within food systems, multiple sectors from national and local governments as well as the local and national scientific community, will have the opportunity to connect, explore options for the future, and together shape both local and national pathways towards sustainable food systems so that by 2030 they are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so they will react to expert analyses and

predictions as well as evidence-based propositions for options of transformation and trade-offs associated with implementation. These will be provided by the Summit's Scientific Group and Action Tracks. The work done in preparation for the Summit will be of crucial value as national efforts to adapt food systems - in line with the national pathway - are taken forward in-country during the coming decade. Due to the involvement of such diverse stakeholder groups, it is anticipated that action in line with the pathway will be strongly supported by local, national, regional and international stakeholder groups. They will indicate their intention (and even commitment) to do so at the time of the 2021 Summit.

## **Who will be responsible for organizing and initiating the FSSDs?**

The UN Deputy Secretary-General has requested, in the initial invitation to Member States, any Member State who plans a programme of Food Systems Summit Dialogues to appoint a National Dialogues Convenor. The Convenor will be responsible for organizing a Dialogues programme which focuses on elaborating a pathway towards sustainable national food systems so that by 2030 they are aligned with, and making significant contributions to, the Sustainable Development Goals. The Convenor is responsible for ensuring that the Dialogues programme contributes to a pathway towards sustainable national food systems through engaging a broad range of stakeholder groups. These should include any and all stakeholder groups who are usually involved in formulating and implementing policies related to food. It is expected that the Convenor will encourage an integrated, interdisciplinary and exploratory approach to shaping the national pathway to sustainable food systems throughout the period of the Dialogues. The Convenor - once the appointment is made - will be connected to the Food Systems Summit Secretariat, invited to register on the *Dialogues Gateway* platform where there is a dedicated helpdesk.

The Convenor may decide to establish an informal group to support the organization of the Dialogues. The organizing group could include Food Systems Champions from the country, as well as leaders from a small number of stakeholder groups. It may also be salient to include individuals who will be ready to assist the Convenor with the organization of the Dialogues. In countries where there is UN system presence, the organizing group could include the UN Resident Coordinator and members of the UN country team (UNRC&CT). The Convenor, UNRC&CT, other members of the organizing group, as well as all others with an interest will be able to access guidance for organizing the Member State Dialogue programme through the *Dialogues Gateway* website. An early task is to consider whether in-person Dialogues will be possible; if not, they can take place virtually, with toolkits and dedicated training for both approaches will be available through the *Dialogues Gateway*.

## **What materials will be available to support the Member State Dialogues Convenor and connect the Member State Dialogues with other workstreams?**

Before the start of the Stage 1 Dialogues, the Member State Convenor will receive briefing materials on the Summit (including the Action Tracks and Scientific group, Champions network and digital platform, amongst other resources) as well as on the national, global and independent Dialogues programmes. The Convenor will also receive resource materials which include guidance on how to encourage different stakeholders working with food systems to comfortably participate. This will include a summary of the kind of information that stakeholder groups may need to encourage their discussions on national food systems and the development of a pathway towards sustainable food systems. The Convenor will be introduced to the Dialogues Gateway website, the Dialogue toolkits and the training available for Convenors, Curators and Facilitators, as well as the helpline facility. The Convenor will be told about the opportunities for Member State Dialogues to relate to other Summit

workstreams and encouraged to make connections between these workstreams and other Member State Dialogues.

## **When will the three stages of FSSDs take place?**

It is recommended that the FSSDs take place in three stages during the months before the Summit as follows:

- Stage one – Initiating national engagement in the Summit – between November and December 2020.
- Stage two - extensive explorations for sustainable food systems – between January and April 2021.
- Stage three – consolidation of the national pathway towards sustainable food systems, and statements of intention from stakeholders – between May and June 2021

The three stages should be completed by the ministerial level pre-Summit meeting which should take place in July 2021. Member States are also encouraged to plan for a fourth stage of Dialogues after the Summit to build on momentum and commitments to advance the implementation of pathways towards sustainable food systems.

## **How does a Member State benefit from organizing FSS Dialogues?**

Each Member State that organizes Food Systems Summit Dialogues is able to engage in the wider effort to make food systems sustainable in several ways. Firstly, the Dialogues provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to making their nation's food systems sustainable in the coming decade, in line with all the SDGs. Secondly, the Dialogues provide opportunities for examining the propositions produced by different Summit preparation workstreams (especially the Scientific Group and the Action Tracks). These can be examined within the national context and the results of this examination can be made available to these workstreams through the Dialogue *Feedback form*. Thirdly, during the Dialogues participants can indicate what they intend to do (and commit to do) in line with the emerging pathway towards sustainable national food systems. The Dialogues help ensure that the Summit reflects national ambitions, and that national efforts benefit from the Summit preparatory process.

## **How do the FSSDs build on existing national initiatives for food systems transformation?**

The programme of Member State Dialogues will contribute to shaping national pathways towards sustainable food systems in ways that reflect the full range of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Dialogues will draw on existing local and national initiatives; in many nations there are numerous stakeholder and territorial groups who have been working on making food systems sustainable - some for decades. Many stakeholder groups are already supporting particular approaches that will contribute to sustainable national food systems and some may be focused specifically on the objectives of the Summit. The existing efforts of these stakeholders will be important and valuable in preparing for the Member State Dialogues and in ensuring they are as productive as possible.

## **What happens in the first stage of a programme for Member State Food Systems Summit Dialogues?**

A Dialogue Curator is identified to run each Food Systems Summit Dialogue. The Curator should have a good understanding of food systems issues, experience with managing multiple stakeholders and, ideally, be familiar with at least some of the stakeholders who will be involved. Together with the Convenor, the Curator decides whether the Dialogue being organized will be in-person or virtual (using an on-line platform).

The Member State Dialogue Convenor then works with the Curator to identify 30 – 100 participants who will be invited to take part in the first stage of the Member State Dialogues programme. The participants will reflect diverse interests within national food systems. Typically, there will be a mix of legislators and officials responsible for policy and implementation within different sectors of government and local authorities as well as local community representatives and traditional leaders.

Participants may include key figures from:

- organizations of food producers (covering farmers, fishers, livestock producers, horticulturalists, foresters) including those representing smallholders, specialist producers and agricultural labourers,
- food processing operations and of organizations representing the workers within them
- associations of small, medium and large enterprises in food systems (including those involved in production, processing, marketing, distribution and retailing) as well as representatives of their employees and suppliers as appropriate
- civil society organizations (including youth and women's, indigenous peoples', consumers', environmental and well-being groups)
- scientific bodies and academic institutions
- schools and other educational institutions
- the catering and hospitality community, including chefs
- regulatory and monitoring bodies
- marketing and communications groups.

Care is taken to invite representatives of all groups of stakeholders involved in food systems including those who do not normally take part in such events (perhaps because of their remoteness or lack of resources).

The Convenor may consult with members of the national Dialogue organizing group to determine who to invite. In practice, some groups of stakeholders may wish to know more about the process before they decide whether to attend. Every effort should be made to ensure diversity, which will mean having a reserve list per stakeholder group.

The Convenor and Curator work with the list of those who have accepted the invitation and divides them into mixed groups of up to eight people to work in discussions groups, at Dialogue tables (if the Dialogues are in person), or breakout rooms (in the case of virtual Dialogues). Co-workers or people of similar disciplines and experience are assigned to different discussion groups. There are always some who find they are unable to attend at the last minute and others who arrive unexpectedly. Adjustments should be expected to be made right up to the start of the Dialogue.

The Curator will be in contact with participants before the Dialogue, ensures the discussion topics to be explored at each Dialogue table are prepared (and are understandable), provides instructions for the conduct of the Dialogue and indicates the kinds of outputs that are expected, offers resource materials (written or video) on the issue being discussed

(ideally some will come from the other Summit workstreams) and, finally, the template on which the outcome from their discussion group will be recorded. The participants at each Dialogue table converse in the language they find to be most convenient. Sometimes they are accompanied by interpreters to aid comprehension.

The Curator appoints a Facilitator at each discussion group whose role is to encourage participants as they explore the issue and develop results from their discussion group. The Facilitator ensures that all participants have an opportunity to contribute and have their perspectives listened to by the others. Facilitators are also required for virtual Dialogues.

Just before a Dialogue starts, the Curator meets with all the group Facilitators to explain their role. At the start of the Dialogue the Curator will then meet with all participants and, in a few minutes, describes the purpose of the Dialogue in contributing to national food systems transformation pathways and the preparation of the Summit. The Curator explains that the discussion time at each discussion group will be between 60 and 90 minutes. At the end of this session, each Facilitator takes five minutes to report briefly to the rest of the participants on the progress of discussions and the feeling at the table. The Curator then sums up the outcomes of the different discussion groups, and encourages further exchanges amongst the participants, giving an opportunity to those in leading positions to comment on what they have heard and felt. Before the end of this first stage of Dialogues the participants indicate whether they agree to stay in contact and to engage in the next stage(s) of the Dialogues.

The Facilitator is responsible for completing the discussion groups outcome form. These forms are used by the Curator to develop the summary report of discussions of all the discussion groups. There is no attribution of any statements to specific individuals. The Curator assembles the forms from all the discussion groups and works with the Convenor to prepare the report of the Dialogue event overall which is made available to all Dialogue participants. The Convenor ensures that relevant extracts from the Dialogue report are uploaded in the Official feedback form on the *Dialogues Gateway* website. The full report of a Dialogue event can be uploaded as an attachment to the feedback form as desired, as well as pictures, videos, presentations or other assets drawn from the Dialogue event. The Convenor also draws on the reports of previous Dialogue events when preparing the next stage in a progression of national Dialogues. Feedback forms and Dialogue reports are used as a basis for overall Member State Dialogue synthesis that will be prepared for the Summit secretariat.

There will be dedicated training and mentoring available for Convenors, Curators and Facilitators of Member State Food Systems Summit Dialogues together with a managed support network that is designed specifically for Convenors.

### ***Answers to the following questions are currently being prepared:***

**What happens in the second stage of the FSSDs?**

**What happens in the third stage of the FSSDs?**

**What problems are anticipated? How will they be prevented and/or rectified?**

**How can individuals and groups not involved in the FSSDs provide input to the Summit?**