CONTENTS

Foreword ................................................................. 3

The Food Systems Summit & Summit Dialogues ................................... 4

  Food Systems Summit 2021 ............................................... 4
  Food Systems Summit Dialogues ......................................... 5

Encouraging Change In Food Systems Through Dialogue ......................... 7

  Why Food Systems? ...................................................... 7
  Changing Food Systems Is Not Straightforward .............................. 7
  Encouraging Synchronized Systems Change .................................. 7
  Dialogues Establish The Landscape And Opportunities For Systems Change... 8

Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues ...................................... 9

  Purpose ........................................................................... 9
  Who Can Convene An Independent Dialogue? ............................... 9
  Convening Participants From A Diversity Of Stakeholder Groups ......... 9
  The Summit Dialogues Method ............................................ 10
  Independent Dialogues Convenor Community: Training And Networking .. 10
  Focus Of Independent Dialogues .......................................... 10
  Discussion Topics ................................................................ 11
  Feedback .......................................................................... 11
  Key Ingredients Of A Successful Dialogue: .................................. 11

Guidance For Convenors Of Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues .... 12
Welcome to the Handbook for Food Systems Summit Independent Dialogues!

This Handbook is designed to help Independent Dialogues Convenors to design and implement Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues. It will be of interest to all who may be involved in organizing, convening, and supporting the Dialogues.

The contents of this Handbook should be read as a series of suggestions for Convenors as they make use of the Dialogue method to help shape local pathways to sustainable food systems. The Dialogue method is highly flexible and can be adapted in line with local priorities and circumstances. Care should be taken, though, to ensure that the seven principles of engagement of the Food Systems Summit are reflected throughout the Dialogue methods that are selected.

In many settings, face-to-face meetings may not be possible either because of the threats posed by COVID-19, or because of communications and logistical challenges. Convenors may wish to use applications that permit online meetings, all the time seeking ways to avoid excluding those groups for whom connection is a challenge.

This Handbook is entirely focused on the programme for Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues. The arrangements for Global Dialogues and Member State Dialogues are presented in other materials.

Detailed information about Food Systems Summit Dialogues is available through the Summit Dialogues website at www.summitDialogues.org. This is where Convenors register, access advice, arrange to participate in training programmes, announce Dialogue events that feature on the global map, upload feedback once their Dialogues are complete, and obtain information from the Summit Secretariat via regular newsletters. The outcomes of all Dialogues will be synthesized and made available to other Summit workstreams.

This Handbook is a living document: we hope you find it useful. Please send any comments to info@summitDialogues.org.

What is the Food Systems Summit?

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has called on all world leaders to take part in a historic Summit in 2021 that will help establish the future direction for food systems and accelerate collective action to that end. This reflects the increasing recognition that transforming food systems is central in efforts to achieve all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragilities and inequalities in food systems: it underscores the urgent need to ensure that food systems are more sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

The Food Systems Summit will launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems. This Summit will awaken the world to the fact that we all must work together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food. It is a summit for everyone, everywhere – a people’s summit. It is also a solutions summit that will require everyone to take action to transform the world’s food systems.

The Summit will bring together key players from the worlds of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, as well as farmers, indigenous people, youth organizations, consumer groups, environmental activists, and other key stakeholders. Before, during and after the Summit, these actors will come together to bring about tangible, positive changes to the world’s food systems.

What does the Summit aim to achieve?

This historic Summit is an opportunity to engage all citizens as food system stakeholders, and bring about tangible, positive changes to the world’s food systems.

The Summit process specifically aims to deliver the following outcomes:

- **Dramatically elevated public discourse** about the importance of food systems leading to the achievement of the SDGs.
- **Significant action, with measurable outcomes** that enable achievement of the 2030 goals. This will include highlighting existing solutions and celebrating leaders in food systems transformation, as well as calling for new actions worldwide by different actors, including countries, cities, communities, companies, civil society, citizens and food producers.
- **A high-level set of principles** established through the process that will guide Member States and other stakeholders to leverage their food systems capacity to support the SDGs. Distilled through all elements of the preparatory process, these principles will set an optimistic and encouraging vision in which food systems play a central role in delivering on the vision of the 2030 Agenda.
- **A system of follow-up and review** that will drive new actions and results; allow for sharing of experiences, lessons and knowledge; and incorporate new metrics for impact analysis.

The Food Systems Summit reflects the urgent need for 1. Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; 2. Shift to sustainable consumption patterns; 3. Boost nature-positive production; 4. Advance equitable livelihoods; 5. Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.

The Summit’s Scientific Group and five priority area Action Tracks link directly to these objectives, and the overall goal of the Summit is to explore how the Action Tracks and other levers of change can best be integrated and contribute to sustainable food systems by 2030 at local, national and global levels.

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**I am delighted to announce the start of the Food Systems Summit Dialogues because this is an exciting opportunity to share the floor with everyone who cares about making food systems more equitable and sustainable. The Summit will only be effective at setting out the pathway to 2030 if we successfully leverage the collective knowledge and experience of the broadest possible cross-section of the population.**

**Dr. Agnes Kalibata**
UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SUMMIT ARE UNDERWAY

In the months before the Summit, all people are invited to engage in a broad consultative process. After all, each of us plays a role in our food systems, and we all have a responsibility to ensure that they function well. By coming together to tackle this vital issue, we can all contribute to a world in which no one is hungry, no one is poor, and no one is left behind. As every one of us continues to adjust to the impacts of COVID-19, the Summit is an opportunity to focus on the fragilities in food systems that are being exposed by the crisis.

FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT DIALOGUES

In preparation for the Summit, the UN Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit has invited all sectors of society to share their perspectives and solutions. Food Systems Summit Dialogues will be conducted around the world both before and after the Summit, effectively crowdsourcing sustainable solutions to strengthen local and global food systems. A diverse range of stakeholders – from youth activists to indigenous leaders, from smallholder farmers to scientists and CEOs – are invited to identify the most powerful ways to make food systems stronger and more equitable. The involvement of different stakeholder groups in the Dialogues is essential because our food systems touch every aspect of human existence.

The Food Systems Summit Dialogues are critical to the Summit engagement process and offer a purposeful and organized forum for stakeholders to come together to share evidence, experiences and new ideas to transform the way the world produces, consumes and disposes of food. The Summit process will draw on the best evidence, ideas, and experiences from around the world to inform new, more sustainable directions for food systems. The Food Systems Summit Dialogues use a standardized approach to convening, curating and facilitating structured conversations among groups with different perspectives on how to get their food systems to work for the common good and in ways that are based on local realities.

Throughout the process, the outcomes of the Dialogues will feed into the Summit’s five priority Action Tracks, and the preparatory work of its Scientific Group, to ensure a dynamic and harmonized global push to support changes in our food systems to deliver the SDGs by 2030.

Dialogue Participants may also step forward to set out intentions and commitments as to how they will contribute, with a goal of fostering new actions, partnerships and initiatives. Through participation in the Dialogues process, stakeholders in every corner of the world can contribute to this milestone UN Food Systems Summit.

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Dialogue Convenor, the first step is to register on the Dialogues Gateway website and subscribe to the newsletter at the same time.

2 https://summitDialogues.org/gateway/

TYPES OF DIALOGUES

Everyone is invited to consider organizing or participating in one of the three types of Summit Dialogues that will take place between now and the Summit. All Dialogues will aim to foster new connections and chart a sustainable path forward. The three types of Dialogues include: UN Member State Dialogues, Global Dialogues, and Independent Dialogues.

Member State Summit Dialogues are taking place largely between November 2020 and July 2021, in a three-stage progression at various sub-national settings as well as at the national level. Further Dialogues after the Summit will share a readout and advance national actions.

Global Summit Dialogues align with global events on major issues like climate, biodiversity, environment, health, economies and jobs, humanitarian aid, water, and related issues connected to food systems within the 2030 Agenda. The Global Summit Dialogues are co-convened by the Food Systems Summit Special Envoy with the main purpose of bringing political attention to food systems in high-level thematic and sectoral meetings and processes.

Independent Summit Dialogues are locally driven and adaptable to various contexts. They are convened by self-appointed individuals or organizations independent from national authorities, and they formally connect into the Summit process through an official feedback mechanism. Independent Summit Dialogues offer opportunities for all citizens to engage directly in proposing pathways towards sustainable food systems, exploring new ways of working together and encouraging collaborative action.
The UN Food Systems Summit will be held in September 2021 in New York, in conjunction with the UN General Assembly. The Summit Dialogues process began in November 2020 and is expected to culminate in June 2021. It is anticipated that pre-Summit Dialogues will be complete by the time of the ministerial level pre-Summit meeting in July 2021. Follow-up Independent Dialogues may also be held after the Summit, to build on momentum and commitments in order to advance local and national food systems transformation.
ENCOURAGING CHANGE IN FOOD SYSTEMS THROUGH DIALOGUE

WHY FOOD SYSTEMS?
The term “food system” refers to the entire constellation of activities and stakeholders involved in producing, processing, transporting and consuming food. Food systems touch every aspect of our existence. The health of our food systems profoundly affects the health of our bodies, as well as the health of our environment, our economies and our cultures. When they function well, food systems have the power to bring us together as families, communities and nations.

But too many of the world’s food systems are fragile, unexamined and vulnerable to collapse, as millions of people around the globe have experienced first-hand during the COVID-19 crisis. When our food systems fail, the resulting disorder threatens our education, health and economy, as well as human rights, peace and security. As in so many cases, those who are already poor or marginalized are the most vulnerable. There is widespread recognition of the need for change: food systems need to become more resilient, sustainable and equitable in line with the SDGs.

Scientists agree that transforming our food systems is among the most powerful ways to change course and make progress towards all 17 SDGs. Rebuilding the food systems of the world will also enable us to answer the UN Secretary-General’s call to “build back better” from COVID-19. We are all part of the food system, and so we all must come together to bring about the transformation that the world needs.

CHANGING FOOD SYSTEMS IS NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD

Food systems are highly complex, vary greatly between locations, and engage multiple stakeholders at every level of society. As we face into some of the greatest problems of our times, a new mantra emerges – that of ‘systems change’. Why?

The major challenges facing our food systems cannot be solved for everyone everywhere through simple, straightforward, linear solutions. For example: the challenge of ensuring everyone can access healthy and nutritious diets cannot be solved just through increasing use of fertilizers or genetically modified crops to boost productivity.

When we continue to look for single, linear solutions because that is our usual way of working, it feels comfortable and stable. But there is no single solution that can be relied on to overcome the challenges, and though many things we currently do are good, they may not be sufficient. Hence the need for a shift to thinking in terms of systems change.

ENCOURAGING SYNCHRONIZED SYSTEMS CHANGE

Food systems stakeholders across the globe have profoundly different interests and perspectives. This complexity means that large-scale change across entire food systems cannot be directed or controlled – that is, systems change cannot be commanded. The emergence of a systems change occurs when, in the presence of enough energy, disturbance, and consistent encouragement, the systems shift, forming new centers of energy and action.
DIALOGUES ESTABLISH THE LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Because the environment is highly dynamic and constantly evolving, we must constantly attend to the underlying ecosystem of relationships and power if we are acting to encourage systems change. The real activity that encourages systems change is not analysis, or programme planning or project management. It is a relational activity that asks us to engage widely and openly, including with those who trouble us. It asks us to enquire into their motive and means. The standardized approach for Food Systems Summit Dialogues reflects the Summit’s principles of engagement\(^1\) and encourages all involved to consider the Food Systems Summit as a major milestone and a call to action to:

- Listen to each other
- Welcome diverse perspectives
- Seek out new connections
- Explore both synergy and divergence
- Work together to identify promising options
- Debate their potential impact, and, over time, shape pathways and commitments for action towards food systems that will be equitable and sustainable by 2030.

As each of us widens our connections and deepens our interactions through a multi-stakeholder Dialogue process, our perspectives shift—we establish new forms of alliance and new solutions. The Dialogues are a purposeful and organized forum for stakeholders to come together to share their roles in food systems, consider their impacts on others and find new ways to come together in support of the SDGs. Convenors of Independent Dialogues are essential change agents, bringing together local stakeholders and providing leadership. To create the ideal conditions for systems change, Independent Dialogue Convenors must:

- Convene a diversity of stakeholders in ways that respect the Summit principles;
- Create spaces and moments (Dialogues) where they connect and explore different facets of food systems from varied perspectives;
- Encourage them to identify promising options, harvest them and consolidate them;
- Establish possible directions towards sustainable food systems: shape the pathways and anticipate that alignment and alliances to emerge through Dialogue.

\(^1\) https://summitDialogues.org/overview/un-food-systems-summit-principles-for-engagement/
Independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues are locally-based and driven, and are fully adaptable to different contexts. They are convened by individuals or organizations outside of national authorities and formally connect into the Summit process through an official feedback mechanism made of a simple standardized template ensuring that all contributions are taken into account for analysis and synthesis. These Dialogues offer opportunities for all citizens to engage directly in proposing pathways towards sustainable food systems, exploring new ways of working together and encouraging collaborative action.

The success of the 2021 Food Systems Summit depends on the engagement of citizens all over the world, across a diversity of viewpoints and sectors. Independent Dialogues will facilitate this engagement in a way that is guided by the values of sustainable development and informed by both science and experience. The outcomes of the Independent Dialogues will inform the Summit process and help to guide individual and collective action towards a future of food that is sustainable, equitable and resilient.

**Purpose**

The purpose of an Independent Dialogue is to initiate a multi-perspective exploration of critical nexus issues that are key for sustainable food systems, through interconnection and engagement with the Food Systems Summit process.

**Who can convene an Independent Dialogue?**

Anyone and everyone with an interest in Food Systems can convene a Food Systems Summit Independent Dialogue. Dialogues give all participants an opportunity to contribute to designing the food systems of the future, and to explore how they can work together to make the transformations happen in the coming decade.

If you are interested in becoming an Independent Dialogue Convenor or have been invited to take part in a Dialogue, the first steps are to:

- Familiarize yourself with the relevant roles: Dialogue Convenor, Dialogue Curator, Dialogue Facilitator and Dialogue Participant.
- If you would like to be a Convenor, please download and read the Convenors Reference Manual.
- Explore Dialogues to learn about the other Dialogues taking place.
- Register for the Take Part Zone to see if there are training sessions to participate in.
- When you are ready to start organizing your Dialogue including announcing it publicly and inviting Curators, Facilitators and Participants, you can do so in the ‘Your Dialogues’ section of the Take Part Zone.
- After your Dialogue event, complete the Official Feedback Form so your Dialogue outcomes contribute to the Food Systems Summit!

**Convening Participants from a Diversity of Stakeholder Groups**

Independent Dialogues are an opportunity for anyone to engage with the Summit in a meaningful way. The Dialogues aim to respect a healthy diversity of viewpoints, encourage shared exploration and reveal promising new ways of working together. Independent Dialogues may include a wide range of stakeholders from different groups directly involved in moving food from farm to fork. Participants may include:

- People who work to feed a population by growing, harvesting, packing, processing, distributing, selling, storing, marketing, consuming or disposing of food.
- People who work in sectors that shape food systems, including infrastructure, transport, financial services, information and technology.
- People whose work affects other critical facets of food systems, including natural resources, the environment, the economy, culture, indigenous knowledge, policies, politics, trade, regulations and more.
- Professionals who work for the health and nutrition of women and children, as well as those who help to govern territories, protect livelihoods, foster resilience, regenerate ecosystems, participate in climate action, manage freshwater, and steward coastlines, seas and the ocean.
- Professionals from small, medium and large enterprises, community.
- Members of more vulnerable stakeholder groups including women, youth, indigenous peoples and migrants.
THE SUMMIT DIALOGUES METHOD

The Food Systems Summit Dialogues method is fully adaptable to local needs and circumstances. Convenors have broad freedom in how they design and organize Independent Summit Dialogues.

A detailed description of the Dialogue methodology is provided in the Reference Manual for Convenors of Food Systems Summit Dialogues,¹ which can be used as a guide.

The only two critical features of Independent Dialogues is that they must be aligned with the Food Systems Summit Principles of Engagement, be multi-stakeholder, and use the Official Feedback Form available on the Dialogues Gateway website.

FOCUS OF INDEPENDENT DIALOGUES

In deciding on the specific focus of an Independent Dialogue, the Convenor is encouraged to consult with different stakeholders and consider how the Dialogue outcome might inform the pathways which will lead to equitable and sustainable food systems by 2030.

Some Independent Dialogues will have a focus on the whole of a food system, others may have a more restricted focus – such as the links between food producers and consumers, or ways to reduce the risks associated with food production. If the focus is more a comprehensive exploration of food systems as a whole, participants could be asked to identify opportunities and challenges, explore synergies between different elements of food systems and examine trade-offs that influence the choice of food systems pathways. The focus may alternatively be on linkages between the five objectives of the Summit and the potential for collaborative action on the five Action Tracks. The focus may be on cross-cutting issues such as policy, finance, innovation, indigenous knowledge, and the empowerment of women, young people and marginalized groups. Or a Dialogue may focus on specific aspects of food systems in a particular locality. Networking and collaborating with the National Convenors of Member State Summit Dialogues may help connect the focus of Dialogues occurring in the same countries.

The focus is reflected in the title of the Dialogue and is entered when the Dialogue event webpage is created on the Dialogue Gateway website. Possible areas of focus for Independent Dialogues may also include:

- Exploring the implications of COVID-19 for systems through which people obtain and use, as well as produce and process, their food;
- Exploring the implications of changing climates for food systems from resilience and adaptation perspectives;
- Exploring the implications of political discord, conflict, violations of human rights, acts of violence and warfare on the relationships between people, food, land (and other assets), nutrition and health; or
- Exploring the Food Systems Summit themes as described in the Action Tracks.


INDEPENDENT DIALOGUES CONVENOR COMMUNITY: TRAINING AND NETWORKING

Dedicated online training and mentoring will be available for Convenors, Curators and Facilitators of all Food Systems Summit Dialogues.

From December 2020 onwards, the Food Systems Summit Secretariat and partners are organizing training sessions for Independent Dialogue Convenors. These will be 90-minute sessions and will cover the Dialogues method and available resources. There will also be opportunities to connect with other Convenors of Independent Dialogues to draw upon the experience of others in the community. Dates and languages of Independent Dialogue Convenor training sessions are available in the Take Part Zone of the Summit Dialogues Gateway.

• Exploring the implications of COVID-19 for systems through which people obtain and use, as well as produce and process, their food;
• Exploring the implications of changing climates for food systems from resilience and adaptation perspectives;
• Exploring the implications of political discord, conflict, violations of human rights, acts of violence and warfare on the relationships between people, food, land (and other assets), nutrition and health; or
• Exploring the Food Systems Summit themes as described in the Action Tracks.
**DISCUSSION TOPICS**

Each of the Discussion Groups in a Food Systems Summit Dialogue consists of up to 10 people including the Facilitator. The Discussion Group is given a Discussion Topic to explore. This is a statement which – in a few words - indicates how a food system that is familiar to the participants in the discussion group will function in 10 years time.

The Discussion Topic acts as a shared objective for participants in the discussion group and encourages a common purpose.

The Discussion Topic is an ambitious projection into a sustainable future. It provokes participants to look beyond the way things are now and to consider what steps must be taken for food systems to be altogether better.

If a Discussion Group does not have an ambitious and forward-looking Discussion Topic, there is a risk that participants will recycle existing thoughts and restate well-established positions. Exploring pathways to an ambitious future is a vital step in shifting existing patterns of thought and identifying actions that need to be taken. Participants are then able to tackle the complex issues and major trade-offs that are associated with implementing these actions in reality.

Discussion Topics are usually linked to one or more of the Summit’s Action Tracks and Levers of Change: this helps to ensure that the results of a Dialogue can be fed into the Summit preparation process.

**KEY INGREDIENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE:**

1. Careful selection of participants - attracting a uniquely diverse set of participants that bring different perspectives on the discussion, in particular less heard, unusual voices. The diversity is reflected in the group as a whole and in discussion groups.

2. Good group size – having more than 100 participants makes the event challenging to manage. The heart of the event are discussion groups of ideally 8-12 individuals each.

3. Pertinent discussion topics that are forward looking, state a positive vision, while addressing complex issues. They should take existing policy and strategy discussions to the next level, addressing "elephants in the room", trade-offs and other challenging issues.

4. A Curator and Facilitators who have a special ability of ensuring all in a group are heard, that contentious issues can be voiced and navigated constructively by the group, and that new connections can be made.

5. An effective technical and logistic set-up that ensures that participants can join on time and go in and out of discussion groups smoothly, whether the meeting is online or in person.

6. An inspiring framing of the meeting through short, impactful opening speeches that provide the political and strategic context and set the tone for constructive discussions.

7. An accurate and powerful synthesis that harvests not just what was said in terms of recommendations but also the mood and spirit of the conversation in discussion groups and plenaries, using the official feedback form.

**FEEDBACK**

After each Dialogue, Convenors will be asked to submit official feedback to the Food Systems Summit: they do this via the Dialogues Gateway website using an online form. A detailed description of the feedback form and process is provided in the [Reference Manual for Convenors of Food Systems Summit Dialogues](#).

All feedback received by the Summit Secretariat will be synthesized in ways that reflect the objectives for the Summit. At intervals during 2021 these syntheses will be made available for the use of the UN Food Systems Summit Scientific Group, as well as the five Summit Action Tracks, the levers of change, the multi-actor network of Food Systems Champions, the Summit UN Task Force and the Summit Advisory Committee. The outputs from the Food Systems Summit Dialogues will also be taken into account in the preparation of the pre-Summit and Summit meetings in July and September of 2021 respectively.
GUIDANCE FOR CONVENORS OF INDEPENDENT FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT DIALOGUES

Convenors of Independent Dialogues have a large degree of freedom in deciding the focus of the Dialogue and adapting the standard methodology. Anyone who would like to become an Independent Dialogue Convenor can register directly on https://summitDialogues.org. The following summary guidance for Convenors of Independent Dialogues will help you get started. We hope your journey will include inspiring connections, innovation and opportunities for enabling multiple stakeholders to shape food systems that nurture all people and the planet.

SERIES OF SUGGESTIONS FOR CONVENORS OF INDEPENDENT DIALOGUES

2. Participate in one of the collective trainings for Independent Dialogue Convenors.
3. Become familiar with the Summit principles of engagement and approach the Dialogue with these in mind.
4. Find out who else is doing Dialogues in the area. Are there Member State Dialogues underway in your country or region? Are you able to connect with the Member State Dialogue Convenor? Find out on https://summitDialogues.org.
5. Consider who you could consult for advice and support.
6. Encourage engagement and exploration among members of specific stakeholder groups (e.g. farmers, fishers, food processors).
7. Encourage connections between stakeholder groups, especially those likely to have differing positions on food systems issues (e.g. farmers and environmentalists, food retailers and consumer advocates).
8. Build on what is already happening in your location: make sure participants have materials to read when preparing and offer materials from the different Summit workstreams.
9. Get started: you can always start again if it is not developing as intended.
10. Be bold and unusual: link up with those who you do not normally work with.
11. Plan the Dialogue and ensure the organizational and logistical arrangements are in place for it to happen.
12. Decide whether you will need a Curator or if you, as the Convenor, will also take the role of Curator. Encourage your Curator to participate in one of the Collective Training opportunities.
13. Plan the programme, special guests, make sure there is plenty of time for discussion.
15. Prepare your discussion topics and plan the discussion groups: maintain diversity in each, limit each to 10 participants, identify Facilitators and encourage them to participate in one of the Collective Training opportunities. Make sure Facilitators are fully briefed before the Dialogue.
16. Capture the outcomes of discussion groups: you may want note-takers to put the outcomes into the "Facilitator discussion group template" available on the Dialogues Gateway. Make sure there is plenty of time to reflect on the outcomes of the discussion groups.
17. Compile feedback via the Official feedback form: decide in advance how and when you will fill it in. It is best to involve the Facilitators in the process and to include them in discussions before finalizing.
18. Consider whether you will have other Dialogues, either pre- or post-Summit. Are participants from the Dialogue interested to work on a particular initiative, or to make a commitment to future action? Can you link up with others conducting similar Dialogues?
19. What kinds of pitfalls might you face?
   • Waiting until everything is perfect before getting started
   • Not connecting with others.
20. Be curious, respectful and ready to move outside of your comfort zone. Enjoy!
**FINAL NOTES**

This is Version 1.0 of the Food Systems Summit Independent Dialogues Handbook. Links to this and other resources will be included in subsequent versions uploaded to the Dialogues Gateway and communicated to all who have subscribed to the Summit Dialogues Newsletter.

This Handbook has been developed by 4SD – Skills, Systems and Synergies for Sustainable Development, in partnership with the Food Systems Summit Secretariat.

**KEY CONTACTS**

For any questions and further information, please register for the Dialogues Gateway at summitDialogues.org and submit your query via the helpdesk.