

# Member States Food Systems Summit Dialogues

## Description of the inception period

*29 January 2021*

### 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The process of Dialogues for the Food Systems Summit was commenced on 16 October 2020 (World Food Day) and was formally announced by the UN Deputy Secretary General on 05 November 2020. The Dialogues are progressing well. As of 22 January 2021, 36 Countries have appointed national Dialogue Convenors with around another 40 countries showing positive signs of engagement in the process. Independent Dialogues are increasing rapidly in number. Attendance at orientation and training indicates that interest continues to grow strongly. There is a momentum to the Dialogue process that is exciting. A breakdown of numbers is attached as an annex to this report.
- 1.2. The method for the Dialogues process has been warmly welcomed. Convenors of Member State Dialogues appreciate how using Dialogue to facilitate the development of a pathway to sustainable food systems connects well with existing budget cycles and development frameworks. The link with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is seen as clear and the emphasis on food systems encompassing all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) valued. The widespread engagement of multiple stakeholders in the Dialogues is seen as critical to ensure the pathways are delivered over the coming decade.
- 1.3. The method continues to evolve as new learning emerges from experiences with countries, independent actors and the elements of the Summit. In particular, more time is being invested in supporting national Dialogue Convenors through the early stages, helping them gain clarity in their planning. The training and orientation programme is constantly adapted to reflect the changing needs of participants. The 'Gateway' ([www.summitDialogues.org](http://www.summitDialogues.org)) performs well; it is now providing clearer signposting to content for the user and is being translated into the six official UN languages.
- 1.4. Much effort has gone into ensuring there is an oscillating flow of information between Dialogues and other areas of Summit activity. In particular, the exchange and flow of information with the Scientific Group, 5 Action Tracks, Levers of Change and Champions' Network. This will become increasingly noticeable as of March. It is anticipated that many countries will begin running stage 2 of their Dialogues from that point including many sub-national and thematic explorations between March and June.
- 1.5. The inception of the Food Systems Summit Dialogues has been a large scale and complex process that has been very warmly received by most actors. The methods will continue to be developed as more is learned about what works well and what can be adapted to improve that process over time and in the light of emerging circumstances.

## **2. Reports on specific elements of the programme**

### ***2.1. What is the range and nature of countries engaged?***

- 2.1.1. As of 22 January 2021, there has been direct contact with 65 governments with regard to the Member-State Dialogue process. There are now 35 Member-state Dialogue Convenors appointed with this number continuing to grow steadily. An active programme of briefings has reached nearly 2000 participants including Member States, their ambassadors in New York, Rome and Geneva, the UN agencies, NGOs, regional and sub-regional groupings.
- 2.1.2. The countries that have appointed Convenors and where conversations are ongoing regarding engagement, span a range of geographies and include developed, middle income and the least developed nations. South East Asia and Europe are particularly well represented and there is growing interest in Central America and Africa. Bilateral, regional and sub-regional briefings are taking place to support this activity and attendance at orientation and training sessions reflects the increasing interest from this broad range of countries.

### ***2.2. Who is the Convenor and how does this reflect the likely nature of national engagement?***

- 2.2.1. The 36 Member-states have appointed Convenors from a range of backgrounds, with some appointing more than one Convenor. Two Convenors represent the President or Prime Minister's Office with another a Permanent Secretary in the Finance Ministry. About 50% of Convenors to date are coming from Ministries of Agriculture or equivalent with 18 Convenors appointed. Foreign ministries are the next largest grouping with 6 Convenors. A range of other Ministries are also represented including Food, Health, Environment and Rural Affairs. There are five Convenors who represent cross-Ministry or national platforms. These include National Planning Commissions and the National Committee on Food and Nutrition or equivalents.
- 2.2.2. There are instances of two Convenors being appointed to span both political and technical functions or to bridge approaches across ministries. 28 men and 9 women have been appointed into the Convenor role with 3 countries making dual appointments of both genders. Convenors are usually (but not always) at a senior political or departmental level.
- 2.2.3. The process of appointing a Convenor may take some time. Local political and administrative considerations have an influence. It takes time for all concerned to understand the requirements of the Dialogue process and the nature of the Summit. Time may be required for negotiations between different interests. The national authorities often consult with representatives of the UN system in country and, on occasions, with the Summit Secretariat and the Dialogues support team. Progress has been encouraged through accompanying governments as they make their decisions about Convenors and consider the shape of national Dialogues. This involves bilateral conversations, briefings, orientation and training as well as intense exchanges between government and supporters.

2.2.4. In summary, Convenors represent a broad mix of appointments, people and approach. Some moving quickly and ambitiously, with others taking time to ensure political, financial and administrative arrangements are in place.

### **2.3. Who is supporting countries to get started and what if any issues are arising?**

2.3.1. The support from UN Resident Coordinators and members of the UN Country Teams (especially FAO representatives, WFP country directors and IFAD country directors) has been of high quality and is vitally important. Their considerable efforts in instigating conversations with Governments and assembling local and regional support continues to be most warmly received. Their active approach to partnering with countries, with each other and with other entities (including WHO, UNDP, World Bank, and UNICEF) that are present in multiple countries is invaluable. The recent re-positioning of the UN Development system has been used to demonstrably good effect.

2.3.2. In some regions there is cooperation with regional institutions to support member states in advancing their Dialogues. In Africa in particular, the African Union Development Agency (AUDA) is actively using its networks to engage with Regional Economic Communities and all member states across the continent on the importance of the Dialogues and approach, as well as how they might inform a regional perspective and regional priorities.

2.3.3. Multi-country networks that support research and development (particularly CGIAR, GAIN and SUN), but also including farmers', consumer, indigenous peoples', women's and youth interests, have also been active in supporting the in-country process. Their commitment has been evident and well-received by member-state Convenors where they are connected.

2.3.4. The Food Systems Summit (FSS) Secretariat is collaborating with the Development Coordination Office of the UN to put in place a mechanism to direct financial resources to Resident Coordinators to support Dialogues in developing countries, and in collaboration with UN Country Teams more broadly.

### **2.4. How are the Member State Dialogues connected to existing in-country initiatives and processes?**

2.4.1. The picture here is encouraging. There are different circumstances in different places and part of the planning process for member state Convenors is to explore this connection. The development of a pathway to sustainable food systems will connect multiple existing initiatives (including National Nutrition Plans, National Agricultural Innovation Projects, and National Adaptation Plans or equivalent where they exist). Connections with the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) refresh process are not yet established in countries but are encouraged.

2.4.2. Convenors welcome the connections with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that are being reinforced as pathways to sustainable food systems are developed. This will provide direction over the coming

decade that ensures greater involvement of a wide range of actors leading to development of local food systems.

- 2.4.3. For some countries the timing is most helpful as they are commencing national planning or budgeting cycles. The Dialogues are thus seen as a useful way to launch or reinforce such processes. For others, the Dialogues provide an opportunity to reconnect a broad group of interests with local food committees. In some countries there are existing national conversations on food. Others are planning how best to connect the Dialogues and Summit processes with their current strategies. Several countries see the Summit as an opportunity to initiate collective action towards sustainable food futures in the coming decade and see the Summit as a useful springboard for a long-term effort.
- 2.4.4. There is also interest from countries to connect their Dialogues to wider regional or sub-regional agendas and policies. There is a desire to make these connections explicit through regional or sub-regional Dialogues, potentially as a way of bringing together outputs from their national food systems pathways into a coherent approach for that region.

## **2.5. What are Member State plans for their Dialogues including diversity of design and engagement?**

- 2.5.1. There has been a range of plans emerging for member state Dialogues. These represent a spectrum of ambition and engagement. The spectrum encompasses some that are actively seeking a very diverse collection of interests and individuals with others planning more formal events. The spectrum also includes Dialogues encompassing all three stages in the standard methodology with the intention of widespread sub-national engagement in stage 2. These member-state Dialogues will actively embrace the independent Dialogues in their country as part of a deliberate effort to broaden diversity of input and inclusion. The spectrum also includes a span of expected outcomes, with some looking for a detailed strategy for the decade ahead while others seek to bring a clear message to the Summit.
- 2.5.2. There is widespread interest in connecting with the Food Systems Summit Action Tracks, Levers of Change, Scientific Group and Champions. Some member states are explicitly focusing on specific Action Tracks and Change Levers, while others seek to use Dialogues to weave together the five Action Tracks and the four Change Levers within their Dialogues so as to encourage the emergence of integrated propositions for sustainable national food systems. It is intended that these will become constituent elements of a national pathway. Other member states want to start with a nationally determined focus and then decide how to engage with the other elements of the Summit. In some Dialogues the focus includes the relationships between food and nutrition, in Europe a greater emphasis is being placed on the relationships between food and the environment.
- 2.5.3. Many countries are intending to embrace a wide and diverse range of stakeholders in their design. They are taking time to explore how to invite groups that might not normally be present in national debates into their

Dialogue process. It is early to determine how widespread this will be. It is also not yet clear how inclusive this process will turn out to be. Ensuring groups that are relevant but may not normally be represented are invited is a positive step; it is then vital to enable their voices to be fully expressed and heard. This takes thought and planning; intentions will be followed with interest.

2.5.4. The impact of Covid-19 has a particular influence on thinking. The pandemic has brought greater urgency. Particular concern is expressed regarding rising levels of hunger and malnutrition, including in developed nations. Access to markets for small and medium scale enterprises is an issue and importing nations underline the importance of the stability of global supply chains. Increasingly countries are relying on digital formats for their Dialogues as the risk of in face-to-face meetings is considered unacceptable. This has two significant impacts on inclusion. First, it limits engagement to those who have the network coverage and technology to engage in online processes. Second, it limits the engagement of those unfamiliar with online processes as a normal means of connection.

## **2.6. What are the expectations regarding outcomes?**

2.6.1. A “pathway” to developing sustainable food systems that links the focus on food with all the SDGs by 2030 is receiving positive responses. Convenors appreciate the value of linking food to the wider global development agenda. The pathway is thus seen as something of lasting benefit beyond the Summit and for the next decade. Countries are therefore welcoming the development of a national pathway to sustainable food systems as an important tool in their progression towards realising the SDGs and climate targets.

2.6.2. All countries undertaking Dialogues express interest in influencing the development of the Summit outcomes. Dialogues are seen as offering Heads of State the opportunity to make strong statements at the Summit based on their country’s pathway. Specific interest is directed towards the feedback and synthesis process. Convenors seek connections with the Action Tracks, Scientific Group and Champions. They wish to see how their feedback will be considered and how their particular interests might be progressed.

## **3. Emerging propositions from the Dialogue process**

3.1. A number of propositions are emerging through the inception period. They are shared at this early juncture in order that they might be tested and developed as the work progresses. They will be added to and reported on in subsequent syntheses. The propositions are as follows.

### **3.2. *Dialogues will make a valuable contribution to the development of Food Systems throughout the world.***

3.2.1. Dialogues will feed greater the connectivity and feedback between governments, in-country actors and the Food Systems Summit. The two-way flow of information will enhance and shape the ambition and deliverable outcomes for the Summit and beyond. This exchange of perspective,

knowledge and practicality will foster the development of new narratives for food.

**3.3. *Patterns will emerge across countries from the Dialogues.***

3.3.1. There will be patterns in food systems that emerge across countries. Indications already suggest food importing countries will seek a global conversation on international food systems. Food poverty in developed nations is an emerging concern. There is a willingness to look at food systems with an inter-disciplinary approach, engaging wider ranges of stakeholders. These patterns will provide valuable information about how best to focus interventions in food systems.

**3.4. *Dialogues will add value to the Action Tracks and vice versa.***

3.4.1. The interplay between the game-changing ideas of the Action Tracks and practicalities of engaging with a complex environment in the member state Dialogues will hone the effectiveness of each intervention. This suggests that the balance and exchange between this knowledge and know-how will accelerate progress towards pathways to sustainable food systems.

**3.5. *Member state and independent Dialogues Convenors are interested to connect and present the independent Dialogues as contributing to the member state programme.***

3.5.1. A number of member state Convenors are openly and explicitly seeking collaboration with independent Dialogues for stage 2 of their national process. They describe this as giving them access to a range of stakeholders they would otherwise struggle to reach in the timeframe. It also spreads the load of administration in the organisation of multiple Dialogues. Many independent Convenors are keen to influence pathways in their country and are asking to be connected to their member state Convenor. This connection can be of benefit to the member state pathway to a sustainable food system by broadening the engagement leading to more realistic and connected plans.

**3.6. *The significant connections between countries, action tracks, science group and champions will lead to a significant global system shift.***

3.6.1. The connections between the various elements of the Summit, member states and the wide range of other interests will be critical in creating the conditions for systems shift towards equity, sustainability and resilience in food systems. The Dialogues will play a critical role in developing the number and quality of these connections as the Summit develops including the introduction of new networks and connections, for example at sub-national level through city networks.

**3.7. *Multiple stakeholders connecting through structured Dialogues increase the likelihood of system shift, especially when using the Levers of Change.***

3.7.1. Engaging with the complexity of food systems is enhanced when working through environments that allow multiple perspectives to be brought into focus on specific issues. As cross-cutting perspectives, finance, innovation,



gender and human rights and law will provide new insights and linkages in Dialogues that create the conditions for systems shift.

**3.8. *Dialogues create space for local stakeholders to establish and advance unusual connections that will transform local food systems.***

3.8.1. There will be a lasting legacy of the Dialogues in countries that engage fully with the process. They will offer opportunities for continuing multi-stakeholder engagement in progressing pathways to sustainable food systems. This will enable the continued development and honing of local approaches.

**4. Reflections on the Inception Period**

- 4.1. The development of a pathway to sustainable food systems is seen as a significant and worthwhile endeavour that brings multiple perspectives and stakeholders into alignment, and contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Nutrition for Growth conference, national development plans and UN Cooperation Frameworks.
  - 4.2. Member States are ambitious for the outcomes they hope to achieve and for how their plans can influence the Summit outcomes.
  - 4.3. The time invested in briefings and personal connections is reaping dividends. There is an enthusiastic and energetic engagement from member states in the Dialogue process.
  - 4.4. Active and coordinated support from the UN System has been widely appreciated. It has been invaluable in building momentum in countries around their Dialogues.
  - 4.5. Continued support from the UN System, Member States, regional institutions, and champions of the Summit process is desired and essential to continuing to build momentum for this Dialogues program and ensuring all 193 Member States are truly aware of and able to engage with this opportunity as they see fit.
  - 4.6. There is excitement around the Dialogue approach which is seen as positive and reflecting a novel process for engagement in a UN Summit that is empowering of countries and people.
5. The inception period constitutes a positive start to the Dialogue process. It provides avenues by which countries are increasingly engaged with the Food Systems Summit.

## Annex: Progress Update on Food Systems Summit Dialogues

*As at 29 January 2021*

### Member States Dialogues:

- 36 countries have confirmed National Dialogue Convenors (31 published on the Gateway).
- At least another 40 countries are in the process of nominating a Convenor.
- 5 countries announced their first national Dialogue on the Summit Dialogues Gateway (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nigeria, Sweden, USA).

Some comments from countries:

- “we want to be a champion in the FSS”.
- “we have established a Food Systems Summit team, by enlarging an existing technical food security team with other stakeholder groups, and developing an action plan to roll out Dialogues”.
- “we focused our first Dialogue around AT1, planning stage 2 Dialogues in 6 districts”.
- “we are planning a 3-stage process with sub-national Dialogues, 170 participants joined first national Dialogue”.
- “our first national Dialogue discussed 10 visions for the future of our food system “
- “we are interested in organizing regional Dialogues”.
- “we are ensuring Indigenous Peoples are included in the Dialogues “.
- “The Ministry of Agriculture and National Nutrition Center are working together closely, getting support from the UN in the country”.

### Independent Dialogues:

- 42 published independent FSSDs announced on the Gateway, many in development behind the scenes.
- 22 independent Dialogues have already happened.
- Interest is building, and we are likely only picking up ‘the tip of the iceberg’. 60 participants in the last training. Significant interest from Champions.

### Global Dialogues:

- First Global Dialogue happened on 1 December. Special Envoy Agnes Kalibata was a Convenor, together with the Co-Leads of the One Planet Network’s Sustainable Food Systems Programme Costa Rica, Switzerland, and WWF.
- Second Global Dialogue happened on 20 January, hosted by the UAE, IRENA, High-level Dialogue on Energy, and FSS Secretariat, with a focus on the interface between food systems and energy.
- Dates of the next global Dialogues are still to be announced. Dialogues are planned related to the environment and water. Further options around finance, the ocean, gender and health are being explored.

### Training sessions:

Offering 4 to 5 orientation and training sessions per week, in all 6 UN languages:

- Member State Dialogue Convenors and their supporters: Thursdays (so far around 60 persons).
- Convenors of Independent Dialogues: Wednesdays (190 persons).
- Curators/Facilitators: Tuesdays (173 persons).

### Translations:

Materials, such as Reference Manual for Convenors and Handbook for Member States, are now available in all UN languages but Chinese (in progress). Gateway translations in progress.

### Summit Dialogues Gateway:

520 registered users in Take Part Zone with recent rapid growth in numbers who are engaged.