

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

CO-DESIGNING the Food Systems Transformation Window of the Joint SDG Fund

17 May 2023

Summary Report

Introduction

On 17 May, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub hosted a consultation on the Joint SDG Fund Food Systems Window as part of the UN Food Systems Solutions Dialogues. The purpose of the event was to present the Investment Strategy, gather National Convenors' feedback on its direction and relevance to ongoing national efforts in anticipation to the Window's formal presentation of the UN 2023 Stocktaking Moment (STM), as well as on priority topics for a first funding round once the Window is launched.

The following represents a summary of the two meeting sessions held in the morning and afternoon to accommodate different time zones.

Discussion

Mr Stefanos Fotiou, Director of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub/Ms Sylvia Ekra, Deputy Director, welcomed participants recalling countries' strong need to leverage finance for scaling systemic food systems transformation, as shared with the Hub in 2022. It was clarified that the resources for the new window exclusively target country support, tapping into the collective efforts of the UN system.

Ms Vittoria Gemelli, Associate Expert at the Joint SDG Fund at the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and Mr Nenad Rava, Head of Programmes, UN Development Coordination Office, presented the Joint SDG Fund. Created in 2019, the Fund anchors the UN's work together at the country level and channels experts to strengthen national enabling environments and catalytic investments. To date, around 147 million people accessed new or extended social protection programs across 39 countries. Moreover, the Fund has played a crucial role in generating an extra US\$ 1.7 billion in financing aimed at advancing the SDGs. In food systems, a total of US\$ 41 million has been distributed between 2020 and 2023 to support initiatives such as shock-responsive protection, the creation of decent jobs, financing SDGs through the Integrated National Funding Financing Framework, and the utilization of blended finance specifically for food systems.

Ms. Ophélie Hémonin, Food Systems Integrated Programming Consultant at the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, presented the Food Systems Window Investment Strategy. The Window aims to achieve four main objectives, in line with National Convenor priorities and consultations with Resident Coordinators. 1. Support advocacy on the role of sustainable and resilient food systems to accelerate sustainable development goals. 2 Advance government-driven, right-based, multi-stakeholder food system transformations based on national pathways. 3. Help reshape the national food finance architecture towards healthier, more equitable, and sustainable food systems. 4. Contribute to building knowledge and learning

networks at national, regional, and global levels to transform food systems. Noting the goal to leverage a multi-year funding envelope of USD 350 million over five years (2023-2028), the new Window would allow greater predictability and flexibility in financing food systems transformation. Proposals will demonstrate impact across multiple areas (food security and nutrition, environment and climate, resilience, livelihoods), and are encouraged to look at co-funding as a demonstration of ownership. Two funding tracks will allow countries with different situations and absorption capacities to submit Expressions of Interest. The Hub's role and technical leadership were clarified in designing the funding rounds, assessment of proposal quality, and overall review of progress and impacts, connecting this progress with the Stocktaking Moment, scheduled to occur every two years.

In the ensuing discussion, participants were invited to reflect on two points: 1. Where are the greatest financing gaps in your National Food Systems Pathway/strategy? What would be priority areas for a first funding round according to your national context? 2. Does the Investment Strategy respond to your country's Food System transformation priorities and expected support needs in the next five years?

David Nabarro and Florence Lasbennes, Strategic Director and Managing Director of 4SD, moderated the interactive discussions.

National Convenors and country support teams welcomed the presentations and expressed appreciation for creating the new Window. They noted its high value-add to provide catalytic seed funding to support systems change and stimulate larger investments in food systems transformation.

Convenors stressed that new funding is welcomed because of fiscal constraints and gaps in implementation capacities. Several issues were considered essential when financing food systems transformation, including legal frameworks, sub-national engagement for nature-positive initiatives, climate change, good governance, and data for decision-making. Convenors also noted that countries in conflict are under extra pressure to tackle food insecurity, and some highlighted the importance of deepening governance mechanisms at the sub-national level to step up the provision of essential services such as social protection. Participants also recalled the need to improve productivity on fisheries, considered a neglected area, and investments in infrastructure, such as rural roads or electrification. Others mentioned the need to capitalize on past lessons from the UN Food Systems Summit process, especially noting the need to look at governance structures to improve coordination.

Regarding immediate financing needs, several countries highlighted the importance of building resilience against climate change, pandemics, and unexpected crises and disasters. Some reported work on monitoring framework with the assistance of the Rome-based Agencies, noting the importance of coordinating cross-sectoral financing strategies. While agriculture is one significant component of food security, Convenors encouraged more attention to building a vision and a platform for a cross-sectoral collaboration to embrace all elements of food systems.

The way forward

David Nabarro summarized the main takeaways:

1. Finance made available through the UN system can help the alignment of actions to national priorities and changes (cost of climate change, policy integration and implementation, etc.)
2. Central structures and institutions have a leading role in effective coordination, but funding often lacks to support their mandate considering the usual siloed programming (domestic and external).
3. Moving the food system transformation effort to provinces, communities where the impact is demonstrated, requires resources.
4. Further attention is needed to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks on a long-term basis to support resilient and sustainable food systems, focusing particularly on neglected segments of food chains beyond the production level, and addressing the imbalances of power that disrupt the linkage among producers and consumers.
5. Multilevel and multisectoral disaggregated data and information are the foundation beneath all these efforts, and more needs to be done to improve timely and quality information systems behind policy decisions.

Thanking all participants, Stefanos Fotiou/Sylvia Ekra emphasized the Window's role in helping countries to close the implementation gap. They underscored the importance of country ownership to guide the proposals for the new Window, calling for governments to increase political support in times when donors are cutting back funds for the 2030 Agenda. National Convenors are "ambassadors for food systems transformation", and the Hub's primary goal is to empower them to lead transformative change. In this regard, the Stocktaking Moment will be an important milestone envisaged as a "ONE UN effort", and provisions are made to support financially the participation of National Convenors from lower and lower-middle-income countries.