

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

LEARNING for food systems transformation: Building Resilience

3 May 2023

Summary report

Introduction

On 3 May 2023, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub hosted the “LEARNING for food systems transformation: Building Resilience” session as part of the Food Systems Solutions Dialogues. The following represents a summary of the two sessions held in the morning and afternoon to accommodate different time zones.

The sessions were opened in the morning by Stefanos Fotiou, Director of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (Hub), and in the afternoon by Sylvia Ekra, Deputy Director of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub. In their opening remarks, they shared updates about the upcoming Stocktaking Moment in July 2023. In addition, they noted the importance of investing in more resilient food systems in light of multiple interrelated crises, notably COVID-19 and the ongoing war in Ukraine. They also recalled the cost-of-living crisis, further emphasizing the need to build resilience and make it imperative for long-term food systems transformation. Finally, highlighting the “five” Ps” (people, prosperity, planet, partnership, and peace), they noted the importance of preserving natural capital to achieve resilient food systems.

Discussion

Ms. Sarah Piccini, Programme Policy Officer, Resilience and Food Systems World Food Program (WFP) moderated the discussion. In a keynote speech, Mr. Martin Frick, Director of the WFP Offices in Berlin and Brussels, highlighted the world’s significant changes since the UN Food Systems Summit took place in 2021. In particular, he noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many countries to go into debt, with the cost of the pandemic estimated to be around one-third of the global GDP. Mr Frick also emphasized that the cost-of-living crisis is not just a problem for the Global North but also affects many people in the Global South. He observed that the number of food-insecure people had increased significantly since December 2021, concerning an estimated 39 billion more people. To address this issue in the short term, Mr. Frick stressed the importance of free trade and the renewal of initiatives such as the Black Sea Grain initiative. He then suggested investing in improving local food processing and transportation to become less dependent on trade. Mr. Frick also discussed the impact of climate change on food security, citing examples such as the six missed growing seasons in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. Mr. Frick’s comments underscored the importance of building resilience from the ground up – including supporting small producers and communities to engage in soil rehabilitation, protecting natural capital, and considering nature-based solutions. In closing his intervention, he stressed that building resilience is critical to food system transformation and ensuring food security for all. This must be done by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to address food insecurity and involving the diversification of production, actors, techniques, customers, markets, and diets.

Participants have welcomed and echoed the critical issues brought up by Mr Frick, especially the importance of diversity and shared their insights on how their countries are becoming more resilient.

Among the many topics covered during the dialogue, the issue of financing food systems to build resilience has been tackled several times. Participants also have stressed the role of traditional and local knowledge in transforming food systems, as it shows how crucial rural and local communities are in bringing this transformation. Women and rural communities were highlighted as “game changers” in this scenario, with participants emphasizing humanitarian aid and assistance as vital, especially in crises. The National Convenor from Sudan stressed how important humanitarian aid is for Sudan, calling for global support to cope with current conflict in this country. Bhutan and Niger noted that they are suffering from security issues and climate change, which are challenging the resilience of its food systems. The Minister of Agriculture of the Gambia highlighted actions to build resilience into the food system, including redesigning policies to meet farmer needs, investing in irrigation and extension services, climate resilient seeds, and the importance of involving non-food actors into food systems discussions. Some advocated for financial and technical aid to overcome this situation and improve their national and international markets. Other interventions touched on issues and practices, such as climate-smart agriculture and, more specifically, seeds resistant to further environmental changes which is crucial to building resilience. Moreover, numerous UN agencies, development partners, and networks of cities and subnational governments are collaborating to transform local, urban, and territorial food systems.

The Stocktaking Moment event will feature significant activity centred around these topics, including coalitions and representatives of subnational governments working to build resilient food systems, especially in times of crises.

The Way Forward

Ms Sylvie Wabbes Candotti, Agronomist and Resilience Advisor at the Office of Emergency and Resilience, FAO, acknowledged that a comprehensive approach is needed to enhance resilience in the face of these challenges. This involves implementing complementary and mutually supportive risk management interventions that work in synergy across various sectors. Effective governance of disaster and crisis risks, such as decision-making processes, regulations, policies, and financing mechanisms, is also crucial. She noted that risk transfer mechanisms such as social protection and insurance can provide further support.

As many speakers, Sylvie Wabbes highlighted the intersection of food and climate change and building resilience as a top priority for many local communities. She also added that strengthening urban-rural linkages is one approach local and territorial actors employ to address food system issues.

Implementing good practices, technologies, and innovations related to Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation conflict-sensitive agriculture at the farm and community level, including livelihood diversification and alternatives, can further enhance resilience. In addition, emergency preparedness, early action (or anticipatory action), and response are essential to building resilience.

To promote resilience, Ms. Wabbes stated that reducing food loss and waste is critical. Additionally, she said that fostering inclusive, resilient, and healthy diets can enhance community well-being and increase the resilience of food systems. She welcomed the portfolio of solutions provided as examples of actions being undertaken by the countries. By implementing these interventions, she noted that it is possible to build resilient food systems that can better cope with challenges and support the needs of local communities.