

CFS Side Event

Diversified food production and diet The challenges of transition to more sustainable agrifood systems

On 13 October 2022, more than 180 participants tuned into the 50th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS50) related to *Diversified food production and diet: The challenges of transition to more sustainable agrifood systems*. The event was co-organized by the FAO Investment Centre, the European Union, the International Cooperation Centre of Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD), the South African DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS) and the SDG 2 Advocacy Hub.

The event, moderated by Mr James Tefft, Senior Economist at the FAO Investment Centre, was an occasion to reflect on the interaction between production and consumption patterns in light of the findings from the Food Systems Assessments (FSA) initiated by the European Union, FAO, and CIRAD and carried out with Governments and agrifood systems actors in fifty countries.

The discussion addressed the obstacles to the diversification of food and production systems, notably in historically export-oriented regions; diversified production systems but lack of diversity of diets due to the affordability of nutritious food; agrifood systems strongly shaped by mono cropping in staple food; and diversified agrifood systems rooted in indigenous regimes.

“More than 90 percent of the United Nations Food Systems Summit convenors identified nutritious diets as a priority area in their respective national dialogues and roadmaps” stated James Tefft in his welcoming remarks. He added that this theme has also been considered as both an opportunity and a challenge in the FSA.

Mr Wilhem Olthoff, Deputy Head of Unit for Sustainable Agri-Food systems and Fisheries in the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), opened the event by briefly outlining how the FSA reports, which also supported the UN Food Systems Summit processes, contributed to placing the discussion on agrifood systems higher in the national and global agendas. “We need to move faster towards the operational scale of this transition”, he stated. Both FAO and the European Union’s opening remarks underlined the importance of developing a collaborative partnership and a common vision with Member States.

These interventions were followed by a brief presentation by Ms Meeta Punjabi Mehta, Food Systems Expert at the FAO Investment Centre, and Ms Ninon Sirdey, Economist at CIRAD. After introducing the analytical insights and key findings emerging from the crosscutting analyses of the Food Systems Assessments, they highlighted the added value of using the Food Systems Methodology as a reference. This document explores the interlinkages across dimensions and geographical scales, the complexity of transition pathways, and the engagement with agrifood systems stakeholders. They also stresses the importance of addressing territorial, economic, and power imbalances in the agrifood systems.

During the panel session, Ms Elizabeth Nsimadala, Agripreneur, and President of the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, underlined the many factors causing low production and consumption of proteins. These include food shortage and affordability, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. As a result, she stated, one in five people in sub-Saharan Africa remains undernourished. She added that there is a worsening health crisis for children as proteins are an important part of a basic diet.

Mr Watson Puiahi, Director of ILuKim Sustainability Solomon Islands (ISSI), spoke about Indigenous Peoples' main challenges related to maintaining their food diversity, keeping their agrifood system resilient, and affordability of healthy diets. The Solomon Islands bear a disproportionate burden of climate change, which has an impact, not only on their food security but also on their lifestyle. By presenting the ISSI Approach, he emphasised Indigenous Peoples' agrifood systems containing extensive and sophisticated ancient knowledge that can be combined with modern climate-smart approaches.

Mr Julian May, director of the South African DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security and lead expert for the Food Systems Assessment in South Africa, highlighted the importance of a systemic approach when addressing malnutrition. He then spoke about the paradox of food insecurity in the country, where farmers are able to compete at international scale and yet farm workers are still food insecure. Finally, he addressed the role technology in agriculture can have not only for development and land tenure but also in attracting youth. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of territorial balance to address diversification of production.

In a recorded video, Ms Frances Piagie Alghali, Minister of State in the Vice President's Office of Sierra Leone stated that the Food Systems Assessment proved to be useful because it provided key information useful for the transition towards sustainable agrifood systems. She added that "It is complementing the work we have been doing". She believes that a multi sectoral platform to address these challenges and take action systematically and consistently is the best way to move forward.

These interventions were followed by a dynamic Q&A session with the audience.

Mr Paul Newnham, Director of SDG2 Advocacy Hub, in his closing remarks, stressed the importance of communicating the insights and findings of the assessments to people that are driving change around agrifood systems. He concluded by talking about farms and the need to invest in extension services, particularly for women, which must accompany research and development programs; agricultural interventions to support sustainable practices that are economically viable for farmers and the need to support the adoption of climate-resilient crops.