

Background note for informal discussion #2: Identifying context-specific strategies for sustainable food system challenges (assessment, diagnosis, and recommendations)

Friday 22 May 2020, 10:30-12:30

Zoom Link: <https://fao.zoom.us/j/7164861700>

Meeting ID: 716 486 1700

Password: CFSmeeting

Overview

1. The first informal discussion in this series (held on May 7) revealed strong agreement on the need to improve the contributions from all food systems toward enhanced sustainability and food security and nutrition. Likewise, participants were consistent in the view that a “one-size-fits-all” approach would not be appropriate. It was suggested that context-specific approaches should be identified based on comprehensive assessments of food systems and analysis of trade-offs.
2. Written feedback on the Zero Draft showed wide agreement on the importance and relevance of assessing and monitoring food systems. This would require agreeing on a framework, metrics, and indicators. There were a range of views expressed on the details of how to go about assessing and monitoring food systems.

HLPE report’s evidence base

3. The [HLPE report on agroecological and other innovative approaches](#) proposes that the need for comprehensive performance metrics, covering all the impacts of agriculture and food systems, is a key requirement for rational decision-making about innovative approaches. It finds that current monitoring frameworks essentially focus on yields, volumes, and incomes and do not address the need to value the multi-functionality of the sector in order to address future challenges ([Caron et al., 2008](#)). Different performance measures are required at different scales and must capture multiple dimensions.
4. The HLPE report recommends establishing and using comprehensive performance measurement and monitoring frameworks for food systems, however it falls short of proposing a complete comprehensive assessment framework with a full set of indicators. The report does recommend one indicator at each of three different scales:
 - a. Field and farm/livelihood scale: total factor productivity of livelihoods ([Sickles and Zelenyuk 2019](#)); disaggregated for household members, e.g. women and children.
 - b. Landscape scale: land equivalent ratio multi-functionality metric ([van Noordwijk et. al. 2018](#)).

- c. Production and consumption across entire food systems: Ecological footprint¹ (Wackernagel, M. et al. 2014).
5. The report also recommends:
- a. Developing performance metrics and indicators for assessing impacts on beneficial organisms, dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes, women’s empowerment, income stability, and employment conditions.
 - b. Recognizing the importance of true cost accounting ([Sukhdev et. al., 2016](#)) for negative as well as positive externalities in food systems, and taking steps to effectively measure this as/where appropriate.
 - c. Undertaking holistic assessments of positive and negative employment and labour characteristics in agriculture to underpin policies and regulations that favour transitions towards sustainable food systems, ensuring decent conditions for farm labour and strengthening the health of farm and food system workers.

Details of stakeholder feedback on the Zero Draft

- 6. Assessment frameworks should be scientifically rigorous and evidence-based. Indicators must take context-specific factors into account and may be different at local/national levels, and require universal comparison and scientific validity.
- 7. Indicators should be agreed upon to ensure measurability. One stakeholder underlined that indicators should be agreed upon *multilaterally*, while other stakeholders mentioned the relevance of indicators agreed through the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.
- 8. Stakeholders have diverging views on ecological footprint and true cost accounting. Some reject them on the grounds that there are no internationally agreed definitions and methodologies, while others find these concepts as highly relevant.
- 9. Principles developed in the HLPE report (see Figure 5 of the HLPE report in Annex 1 of the present document) may be relevant to assessing and monitoring food systems.
 - a. Some stakeholders support using the HLPE’s operational principles² as a framework for development of food system assessments. The following additional principles have been proposed by stakeholders, to be added to the operational principles:
 - i. Sustainability;
 - ii. Delivering safe and nutritious food;
 - iii. Reducing GHG emissions and increasing carbon sinks;

¹ Ecological footprint expresses the impact of food consumed by a defined group of people measured in terms of the area of biologically productive land and water required for production and to assimilate the wastes generated. It contributes to assessing sustainability; its trend over time indicates to what extent transitions towards SFSs are occurring (HLPE report).

² (i) improving resource efficiency; (ii) strengthening resilience; (iii) securing social equity/responsibility; (iv) ecological footprint

- iv. Increasing biodiversity in farming systems to support resilience and dietary quality and diversity.
- b. Other stakeholders support using the HLPE transition principles.³
 - i. Proposed additional principles: fairness, ecological impacts of food systems, human health, dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes, women's and youth's rights.
 - ii. Many stakeholders expressed support for FAO's 10 Elements of Agroecology, which are similar to the HLPE's transition principles.
- 10. Some stakeholders call for consultations with agricultural producers, particularly small-scale food producers and those most affected by current production models to ensure that any such metrics are relevant to regional conditions and specific food products.
- 11. Some stakeholders call for the development and application of holistic performance measurements for agroecology (e.g. [FAO Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation](#)), since agroecology includes more dimensions than other approaches and therefore requires new methods to aggregate a variety of metrics.

Questions to guide discussion to explore convergences

1. Do you agree that a comprehensive assessment and monitoring framework is needed for sustainable food systems that enhance food security and nutrition (with related metrics and indicators)? Do the recommendations of the HLPE provide a pathway forward in this regard?
2. Is it too ambitious to agree on indicators within the policy convergence process and should the aim instead be for the policy document to agree on principles/elements to be the basis of a framework, which would be developed after this policy process is completed?
3. Should such a framework be elaborated based on the findings of the HLPE report, relevant existing frameworks (e.g. [FAO Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation](#) and the TEEB AgriFood framework), and/or the goals, targets and indicators contained in the SDGs?
4. Which institution(s) could be tasked with developing such a framework? Which actors should be involved? What role do you see for the CFS, its Working Group or Technical Task Team in this regard?

³ Regenerative production, recycling and efficiency, animal health, synergy, diversity, integration, climate change adaptation and mitigation, knowledge production and dissemination, cultural coherence, human and social values, connectivity, governance, empowerment and participation.

Annex 1: HLPE Figure 5, Framework for innovative approaches to sustainable food systems for food security and nutrition

Figure 5 Framework for innovative approaches to SFSs for FSN

