



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#HLPF #SDGs #GlobalGoals [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020)

## Building better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs

### Ending hunger and achieving food security

*(Most closely related SDGs: SDG 2, SDG 3 and SDG 17)*

**Tuesday, 7 July 2020, 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM**

### Secretariat Background Note

#### Executive summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. Progress has been made toward ending hunger and improving food security over the last couple of decades: however, the continuing increase in hunger over the last years, with a persistent high number of hungry population and the emergence of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases worldwide are adding complexity and urgency to the challenge. If Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 and its targets are to be met, efforts must accelerate and deepen in the context of the UN Decade of Action. At the same time, meeting the projected food demand of the growing world population, and improving nutritional outcomes may not be achieved in a way that is compatible with sustainable utilization of natural resources and thus can create significant trade-offs within SDG2, or with the other SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement for climate change.

Transitioning towards sustainable food systems will imply a focus on enabling more equitable global access to healthy diets, sustainable agriculture production, maximizing the nutritional value, reducing food loss and waste, providing decent livelihoods for all actors, minimizing the climate and environmental impacts and increasing the resilience of food systems. The impact of large-scale landscape degradation is already severe, and the pace of land use change, deforestation and environmental degradation are particularly concentrated in rural areas. Therefore, adequate public policy, investment, innovation, and adaptable business models are a requirement for the transition to sustainable food



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systems, paired with changes in governance, behaviour and economic incentives, as well as international collaboration<sup>1</sup>.

The current COVID-19 pandemic will add to and amplify existing challenges facing food systems, especially in vulnerable countries. The near breakdown of food supply chains in many developing countries and the sharp increase in people suffering from acute food insecurity as a result of COVID 19<sup>2</sup> show that food systems have been unprepared to face such emergency. This has also been the case, albeit at a smaller scale, for other epidemics or pandemics, such as Ebola, SARS and MERS. Our food systems must be substantially re-thought in terms of their resilience in two ways: (a) ensure that epidemics and pandemics do not turn into food security and nutrition crises and (b) limit or eliminate transmission of animal diseases to humans (zoonotic diseases).

Strengthening the efficiency, effectiveness and resilience of food system may imply complementarities and tradeoffs with other SDGs and with the fundamental role of the systems to feed an increasing, wealthier and more urbanized population and satisfy increasing demand for, *inter alia*, livestock products.

## Challenges

In 2018, more than 820 million people in the world were still hungry, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030. Hunger is on the rise in almost all African subregions, making Africa the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment, at almost 20 percent<sup>3</sup>. Globally, around 2 billion people suffer from food insecurity. To reverse the trend of the rise in hunger and build back better from the impacts of COVID-19, the resilience and adaptive capacity of the urban and rural poor will need to be strengthened. In countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the share of production of small-scale food producers is substantial. In addition, smallholder production systems and associated small and medium enterprise (SME) finance and investments are an engine of growth for local economies, including for rural towns and small cities. The trends in food system transformation favour greater concentration of production and of activities from farm to fork putting pressure on the very existence and livelihoods of smallholder systems. Public policy, including research and extension systems, is not conducive to increasing productivity and improved livelihoods of small

<sup>1</sup> See also GSDR 2019: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fsinplatform.org/global-report-food-crises-2019>

<sup>3</sup> SOFI 2019



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farmers and SMEs. Increased investments in climate-proof infrastructure, adaptation of technology, extension and advisory systems, including access to credit and financial inputs as well as markets, in support of sustainable agriculture and enhanced preparedness disaster response are urgently required.

Serious problems remain at the consumption side of the food system. Malnutrition is linked to human health problems and developmental outcomes. While in nearly every region, stunting has been decreasing since 2000, more than 1 in 5 children under 5 years of age (149 million) remained stunted in 2018. At the other end of the spectrum, unhealthy diets resulted in 40 million children and 2 billion adults being overweight in 2018 worldwide. In 2016, the probability of dying between the ages of 30 and 70 from any of the four main non-communicable diseases, namely cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, was 18 per cent. Unhealthy diets make a substantial contribution to these diseases.

The present practices of producing, processing and distributing food are not sustainable. Already today, food systems release 29 percent of global green-house gases (GHG), and agriculture is responsible for 80 percent of deforestation and 70 percent of freshwater use. Other challenges persist, such as institutional deficits, especially regarding protections for smallholder farmers, damaging agricultural practices, losses and waste throughout the food system (from farm to fork) and a system of incentives which promotes unhealthy dietary habits.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the current COVID-19 pandemic is threatening global food security. Related challenges are, for example, trade barriers or export bans, revenue losses hampering food imports, logistical constraints and labour shortages, which can also put pressure on prices, worsening the realities of those most vulnerable, including rural populations, and on households who live hand-to-mouth and have limited access to social safety nets. Ensuring food security for populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will demand coordinated action within and across the three components of food systems: 1) Production 2) Trade and distribution; and 3) Consumption. Protecting and sustaining food systems and markets during the crisis will significantly reduce economic and food insecurity risks to communities and enable more rapid recovery.

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<sup>4</sup> See also GSDR 2019: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019>



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## Interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs

There is already a significant amount of knowledge about important interactions in food systems where interventions around one Goal or Target can alter the possibilities of meeting other goals by **harnessing synergies** across goals and targets to generate multiple positive outcomes (ie. actions that reduce hunger, increase access to decent work and ensure healthy lives); **mitigating trade-offs** between Goals (ie. actions that increase food security while also combating climate change and ensuring enough freshwater supplies); and accelerating progress towards achieving the overarching objective of **'leaving no one behind'**. An integrated approach is required by balancing the tradeoffs and promoting policies that support a transformation of agriculture and food systems. As an example, expanding livestock production can be linked to positive outcomes, such as improved livelihoods and farmer incomes and protein availability supporting better nutrition and health outcomes. However, unsustainable livestock production can also be associated with substantial increases in GHG emissions, decrease in forest cover, water insecurity and terrestrial biodiversity loss while excess consumption of livestock products is associated with overweight and obesity and an increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases<sup>5</sup>. We also know that some forms of animal husbandry may be more conducive than others to the generation and spread of animal and/or zoonotic diseases.

Objectives of ending hunger and achieving food security for all should be pursued in ways that reduce tensions with other sets of goals and are inclusive of vulnerable groups, different gender perspectives, regions and ecosystems (see table). Synergies and integration with interventions in other areas (i.e. social protection, health and nutrition and climate change) should be pursued reinforcing system-level transformations to address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Some progress has already been made to build synergies and address trade-offs through food systems.

System	Closely related SDGs selected for HLPF	Selected SDGs with synergies to harness	Selected SDGs where trade-offs need to be mitigated
Ending hunger and achieving food security for all: <i>strengthening livelihoods of the poor,</i>	2, 3, 17	1,5,8	6, 13, 15

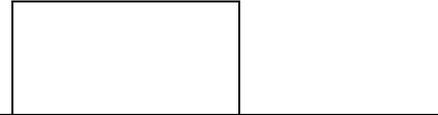
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2009/en/>



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*ensuring sustainable and healthy food  
production systems and improving the lives  
of all*



## Recommendations for action: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

As the world is planning for the post-pandemic recovery, there is a crucial and narrow window of opportunity to build back better. As our food systems sit at the intersection of the health and socio-economic response, transformative actions are needed to simultaneously support equitable access to nutritional foods and healthy diets to end hunger and malnutrition, sustainable management of agriculture and natural resources as well as reduction of food loss and waste and GHG emissions of food systems. Smallholder producers, farmers and SMEs should have the lead role in shaping these transformations. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Decade of Action, the international community must work together to address challenges in an integrated way. For this, sustainable systems change solutions are available and the future looks positive given the substantial knowledge about interactions among food systems and in relation to the SDGs, and promising new partnerships that enable collaboration among important levers of action – governance, business and finance, individual and collective action, and science and technology. Sharing information, building innovative partnerships and identifying ways to fill knowledge and data gaps, scale up actions, and address context specific conditions will be the key to successful transformation.

## Guiding questions

- Which areas and socio-economic groups are especially vulnerable to poor nutrition and food insecurity, including women and girls, and what are ways to ensure that food systems transformations leave no one behind?
- What fundamental changes are needed to make our food systems an engine for inclusive growth and contribute to accelerating progress towards ending hunger and achieving food security for all in the Decade of Action?
- How might COVID-19 facilitate or complicate the implementation of needed food systems changes?





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- What knowledge and data gaps need to be filled for better analyzing current successes and failures in food systems and the trade-offs and synergies, across SDGs, in implementing food systems changes to fix these failures?
- What means of implementation, including STI, and partnerships are needed to harness synergies and/or reduce trade-offs in food systems?