

2021 United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

HLPF Thematic Review Expert Group Meeting Session on SDG 2

18 May from 8:45-10:15 am EDT

Response to the guiding question – Ms. Robynne Anderson, Director General of the International Agri-Food Network

Key Messages

1. *Recalling the words of the World Food Programme, it is time to focus urgently on food and nutrition security as a foundation for success of all the SDGs. We must ensure sustainable food systems for inclusive growth and ending global hunger.*
 2. *The COVID-19 pandemic has set the ambitious and elusive SDG targets even further off track for completion by 2030.*
 3. *In reality, since 2015 SDG 2 has been moving backwards; and yet agriculture, food, and nutrition interventions remain underfunded in the development context.*
 4. *Addressing rural multidimensional poverty is a critical part of food systems transformation.*
 5. *A diversified food system is a resilient food system. Recognize contribution of small, medium, and large enterprises across a broad cross section of crops, livestock, horticulture, agro-forestry, and fisheries to improve environmental economic, social, and nutritional outcomes. This includes the fact that trade provided vital solutions during the pandemic, proving that global, regional, and local food systems are all important.*
 6. *Multi-sectoral and multi-institutional approaches and inclusive multistakeholder engagement processes should be a priority in building sustainable food systems that deliver the ambitions of SDG2.*
 7. *Increasing the ability of farmers and SMEs to take up data-based solutions, including greater access to rural bandwidth and cloud computing are essential to moving to state-of-the-art data science methodologies and collection systems that can track SDGs in real-time.*
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Guiding Questions

1. ***What is the current status of the Goal or target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?***

The recently released [Global Report on Food Crises 2021](#) points to an increase in the number of people facing acute food insecurity and requiring urgent food, nutrition, and livelihoods assistance. According to the report, the magnitude and severity of food crises worsened in 2020 as protracted conflict, the economic fallout of COVID-19, and weather extremes intensified pre-existing weaknesses. The 2021 report estimates that at least 155

million people were acutely food insecure and urgently in need of assistance or equivalent in 2020 in 55 countries/territories that asked for external aid – the highest level in five years of the report. Forecasts point to a grim outlook for 2021, with the threat of famine persisting in some of the world's worst food crises¹.

Key message: *Recalling the words of the World Food Programme, it is time to focus urgently on food and nutrition security as a foundation for success of all the SDGs.*

We must ensure sustainable food systems for inclusive growth and ending global hunger.

2. What has changed since the last time this Goal was reviewed at the HLPF?

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the health crisis has triggered an economic crisis and a protracted rise in food insecurity. Basic sustenance has become unaffordable for the world's poorest, and disruptions to health and nutrition services will have long-term consequences². In addition, the 2021 Food Systems Summit Dialogue process has galvanized action in an unprecedented way towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 2. The challenges of achieving SDG 2 have been highlighted in a way that has not been done before. Another significant change has been the US's return to the Paris agreement, the internationally binding treaty to combat climate change. The US's return to the Paris agreement has important implications on efforts to address climate change, which impacts global agriculture; the US is responsible for 15 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Key message: *Several high-level responses to recent crises and political change present an opportunity to build sustainable and resilient food systems. Addressing rural multidimensional poverty is a critical part of food systems transformation and achieving all the SDGs.*

(a) Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to COVID-19)?

The ripple effect and implications of COVID-19 are far-ranging from disrupting humanitarian aid, peace operations, and postponing to distracting efforts. The pandemic has set the ambitious and elusive SDGs even further off track for completion by 2030. While the pace of global poverty reduction was already slowing, the current pandemic is expected to push 40 to 60 million people into extreme poverty. The number of people suffering from severe food insecurity has steadily increased since 2015, and the pandemic is worsening the situation³. By the end of 2020, an estimated 83 to 130 million more people joined the 690 million people currently impacted by hunger.

Key Message: *The COVID-19 pandemic has set the ambitious and elusive SDG targets even further off track for completion by 2030. In reality, since 2015 SDG 2 has been*

¹ Robynne Anderson. <https://robynneanderson.com/2021/a-worrying-outlook-for-the-worst-food-crises-in-2021/>

² Financing SDG2: Hunger and malnutrition – what will it take?. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/financing-sdg2-hunger-and-malnutrition-what-will-it-take>

³ Hunger, poverty, decent work: the covid-19 crisis slows <https://www.novethic.com/csr/isr-rse/hunger-poverty-decent-work-the-covid-19-crisis-slows-progress-towards-sustainable-development-goals-148915.html>

moving backwards, and yet agriculture, food, and nutrition interventions remain underfunded in the development context.

(b) Additional obstacles or opportunities in implementation including through interlinkages with other Goals, and connections to related processes?

Sustainable food systems are complex, from farm to fork. There is need to ensure that we maximize the productivity of all natural resources to adequately feed and nourish the growing population, whilst at the same time protecting the environment. A diversified food system is a resilient food system. Recognize the contribution of small, medium, and large enterprises across a broad cross section of crops, livestock, horticulture, agro-forestry, and fisheries to improve environmental economic, social, and nutritional outcomes. This includes the fact that trade provided vital solutions during the pandemic, proving that global, regional, and local food systems are all important.

The Private Sector is integral to food systems - producing the vast majority of all the world's food and is made up of diverse actors including family farms, community or co-operative groups of producers, local fisher folk, and individuals. Many of these actors fall outside social protection programmes since they are small enterprises.

Key Message: *The interlinkages and connections that exist within the global food systems should be leveraged to ensure **social protection** and inclusivity and environmental and economic sustainability for the entire society. A **diversified food system** is a resilient food system.*

(c) New/promising openings for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?

For decades, basic metrics such as food available per capita or the rate of stunting among children have been measures for food security. However, these have challenges on their own. Looking at the amount of food stored in national reserves does not account for inequalities in access to that food. At the same time, things like infectious diseases and parasites confound population-level metrics like rates of stunting. As we look further into the suite of SDG 2 targets, we can see that new technologies can be powerful tools not only to help measure progress, but also to achieve that success. To do so requires greater access to digital technologies in rural areas. Increasing the ability of farmers and SMEs to take up data-based solutions, including greater access to rural bandwidth and cloud computing are essential.

Key Message: *Increasing the ability of farmers and SMEs to take up data-based solutions, including greater access to rural bandwidth and cloud computing are essential to moving to state-of-the-art data science methodologies and collection systems that can track SDGs in real-time.*

3. **What are promising strategies to accelerate action (by UN and partners) and to mobilize other stakeholders to advance implementation?**

The recent World Bank [2021 Spring Meetings](#), highlighted some good lessons emerging from multi-sectoral and multi-institutional approaches, that address food and nutrition security needs, using a gender lens and paying particular attention to pregnant/lactating women and children below two years of age. In Rwanda, the government's stunting reduction program incorporates both a supply-side and a demand-side solution – covering a health project and a social safety net program, complemented with an agriculture project. There is a need to build on [global social protection responses to the pandemic](#) to increase resilience, harness human capital, and bolster economic inclusion. For example, the [Sahel Adaptive Social Protection](#) platform has shown that combining cash transfers with other interventions positively impacts income, livelihoods, asset ownership, and savings⁴. In addition, the Food Systems Summit Dialogues process is providing a powerful opportunity for a diverse group of stakeholders to engage meaningfully, explore collectively, and identify the most powerful ways to make food systems more robust and more equitable.

Key Message: *Multi-sectoral and multi-institutional approaches and inclusive multistakeholder engagement processes should be a priority in building sustainable food systems that deliver the ambitions of SDG2.*

4. **How would one monitor action for implementing these?**

National leadership is key and the excellent work of FAO and other UN agencies to report on implementation is essential. There are two areas where the task remains daunting: the package of sustainability metrics should focus on key measurable outcomes not just practices. A focus on soil health, soil organic matter, water quality, water drawdown, GHGs, and biodiversity should be a useful set of priorities. As well, there is little focus on SDG 2.5 or its outcomes.

Key message: *There are two areas where the task remains daunting: the package of sustainability metrics should focus on key measurable outcomes not just practices and 2.5 has received virtually no attention.*

⁴ Financing SDG2: Hunger and malnutrition –what will it take?. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/financing-sdg2-hunger-and-malnutrition-what-will-it-take>