



CIRCULAR FOOD SYSTEMS

Food Policy and Food Security |

POLICY BRIEF



The Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENVforum) Annual Conference 2021 focused on Circular Food Systems as possible solutions to reverse climate change. Co-organised by the Stockholm Environment Institute, one of the workstreams of the conference focused on “Food policy and Food security”. The session aimed to gather evidence and experience from various stakeholders. It served as a platform to discuss issues that constitute food security from a multistakeholder perspective, including access to sustainable food systems, local and large-scale food systems and production, climate change threats, and social inclusion. With a distinguished panel of experts and the active involvement of participants, the session discussed how food policies could support a transition to functioning and resilient food systems, upscale food system innovations, create agribusiness value chains, and foster multistakeholder partnerships.

KEY MESSAGES:

The session outcomes recognised the need to unpack the current food system inequalities and promote policy transition to a sustainable, inclusive, and circular food system.

- Panellists emphasised that we are in a critical need to change the narrative surrounding our food system not only for food production but also to secure a nutritious and healthy diet for all. There is a need to adopt human-rights-based approaches to food security, accelerate the translation of the policies into actions to adopt inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems as the new normal. These can also ensure the achievement of relevant SDGs, on which we are currently lagging.
- There is a strong call for small-scale food producers, including indigenous people, women, youth farmers, and smallholders, to be at the centre of food policies as their involvement can contribute to securing food security.
- The role of technology and innovation was also highlighted as means to support farmers to adopt circular practices that can help to adapt and mitigate the impact of climate change. There is also an urgent need to make finance accessible and the quest to have inclusive, circular, and viable business models.
- It was recognised that, with the involvement of different stakeholders, all sectors need to collaborate, coordinate, and share the responsibility to create a sustainable food system approach.

FOOD POLICY AND FOOD SECURITY IN ASIA AND EUROPE

Food policy can be understood as a set of public policies that address food production, processing, distribution, and consumption. Traditionally, the focus of food policies was food security. However, with the increase in food production,

“Despite the numerous efforts, food security is still seen as a significant challenge globally.”

lifestyles changes in developed and increasingly in many developing countries, food policies have been progressively focusing on food and nutrition quality. Thus, to be considered food secure, citizens should, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.¹



Figure 1: Dimensions of Food security

Source: HLPE. 2020. Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030

Despite the numerous efforts, food security is still seen as a significant challenge globally. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has worsened global food security: UN report estimated that 660 million people will be facing hunger by 2030. This put off track in achieving the 2030 Agenda, especially Goals number 2 on Zero Hunger.

The growing double-threats of climate change and biodiversity loss have brought other challenges that food policies must address. The agri-food sector is responsible for approximately 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) via direct emissions from agricultural production and deforestation, which is primarily induced by land conversion for agricultural purposes.² Although with the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, signatory countries have strengthened their commitments and started to improve their mitigation plans, if no action is taken, the agri-food sector could become the primary source of GHG emissions by 2050.

1 HLPE. 2020. Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

2 Climate Change and land, an IPCC Special Report, <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>

It could hamper the goals set in the agreement.³ Aiming to support addressing this gap, signatories of the Paris Agreement adopted the “Koronivia joint work on Agriculture”, which seeks to address issues related to agriculture with considerations given to food security and the impacts of climate change on the sector.⁴ While negotiations at the COP26 saw results in promoting the resilience of the agri-food system and supporting its decarbonisation, further work is needed to address climate-related challenges in the food sector.

Food policy is defined by the Farm to Fork strategy in the European Union. The policy is an integral part of the European Green Deal, aiming to transform the EU into a resource-efficient and competitive economy. It aspires for “no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050; economic growth decoupled from resource use and no person, and no place left behind”.⁵ Contributing to this vision, the Farm to Fork Strategy is set out to transform the current food production practices and create a sustainable, healthy, and fair food system.⁶ The strategy will underpin the research and innovation program and the financial instruments of the EU and will support the development of a legislative framework for supporting a sustainable food system transformation of the Common Agricultural Policies in the EU Member States.

In Asia, the ASEAN cooperation in the agriculture and food sector is taking forward an agenda on sustainable food systems in the context of globalisation, rapid economic growth, and climate change. The Strategic Plan of ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry 2016-2025 aims to ensure equitable, sustainable, and inclusive growth; alleviate poverty and eradicate hunger; ensure food security, food safety, and better nutrition while promoting regional integration; enhancing access to global markets and increasing the resilience of the sector, while contributing to mitigation and adaptation of climate change.⁷

CHALLENGES FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE, CIRCULAR, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

The panel discussion recognised the failure of current food policies to address systemic challenges in the food system. These challenges concern food supply and nutrition, as well as food access and affordability. For example, 1.9 billion people in Asia cannot afford a healthy diet; hence malnutrition is prevalent. Furthermore, food policies that only focus on increasing food production cause environmental degradation, marginalisation of smallholder producers, and growth in inequalities and, as a result, promote unsustaina-

ble agricultural production practices and the overuse of natural resources.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing threats of climate change and biodiversity loss, participants of the session identified the following key challenges that can hamper the transformation to more inclusive, circular, and sustainable food systems:

- (1) insufficient policies that can secure access to food for all;
- (2) unsustainable production practices and consumer behaviour, including overusing resources;
- (3) lack of access to finance, technology, human resources as well as to promote access to markets as well as
- (4) lack of policies to secure circular supply chains.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing threats of climate change and biodiversity loss, participants of the session identified the following key challenges that can hamper the transformation to more inclusive, circular, and sustainable food systems:

SOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSIVE, CIRCULAR, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

An overview of the solutions identified for each problem area is presented below.

1. DEVELOPING POLICIES TO SECURE ACCESS TO FOOD FOR ALL (INCLUDING FOOD SECURITY, MALNUTRITION, LOW FOOD QUALITY, HIGH FOOD PRICES)

Food security needs to be framed as a human right to ensure that no one is left behind. Countries are obliged to give the right to everyone to sustain their food systems, building on their existing resources and respecting their indigenous, traditional, local knowledge.

To address this complex policy challenge, radical transformation of the current food system is a prerequisite. To support the development of human-rights based food systems, support for research organisations, local CSOs, and local communities are needed to collect data for informed and evidence-based policymaking. Participants also outlined that food policies and programs should support innovations focusing on the resilience of the local food system. While there are lots of experience on the ground, these remain in the periphery as they lack support. Smallholder food producers already produce safe and nutritious food using sustainable systems such as agroecology and agrobiodiversity. This needs to be supported and mainstreamed. For example, portable farming systems (e.g., rooftop gardens, aquaponics) are easily scalable and portable farming systems that can be an incentive for communities with insufficient access to food to grow their own and be

3 <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/climate-change-and-food-systems/>

4 <https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/agriculture>

5 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

6 https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en

7 <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/enhanced-connectivity-and-sectoral-development/asean-food-agriculture-and-forestry/>

independent of long supply chains. Moreover, strategic and well-planned subventions targeting the most vulnerable are also needed.

2. ADDRESSING UNSUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION PRACTICES, INCLUDING OVERUSING RESOURCES

To promote regenerative agriculture practices and nature-based approaches for creating sustainable food systems, there is a need to raise awareness, create consumer buy-in through education, and make regenerative farming profitable compared to conventional. This latter can be promoted by addressing food policy biases towards large-scale food production, which favours big producers and corporations and marginalises smallholder food producers, as well as by increasing prices or raising taxes for corporations incorporating unsustainable agriculture progression and subsidising regenerative farming technology to incentivise corporations to make the switch.

Food policies should also avoid taking a silos approach and should be developed by applying a strategic, system-focused approach to be able to address system-level challenges. Research on improving regenerative farming technologies should also be funded so that local food systems become scalable and mainstream. Lastly, implementing assessment frameworks to promote plans and projects that prioritise sustainability and circularity are also required for a transition to circular food systems.

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMIC ACCESS TO FINANCE, TECHNOLOGY, CAPACITY BUILDING, HUMAN RESOURCES THAT CAN PROMOTE CIRCULAR FOOD SYSTEMS

Panellists suggested that there are several market imperfections in place, and therefore scaling smallholders is needed to help their access to technology, human resources, and

finance. The role of innovation was outlined since these often have the potential to accelerate adaptation to climate change and contribute to food security at the same time.

Participants of the meeting concluded that an enabling framework for inclusive, circular, and sustainable food systems should promote technology innovation and adoption/uptake (with involvement of governments, businesses, civil society, research organisations); create opportunities for inclusive finance and bankability (underpinned by viable business models); focus on local innovations and support these (with policies taking into consideration different contexts and players' constraints) as well as create partnerships with rural finance organisations to enhance access to finance for poor and vulnerable people.

4. POLICIES TO PROMOTE CIRCULAR SUPPLY CHAINS, GREEN PROCUREMENT, ACCESS TO MARKETS

For a food system transformation, access to the market is a crucial question, and the specific context of different actors along the supply chain should be better assessed and understood.

The outcomes of the discussion agreed that there is a need to strengthen local food supply chains and organising smallholders and farmers to become one unity, making them a stronger market actor. Focus on innovation and regulatory sandboxes for innovative business, establish direct links between small producers and retailers (direct farm to market roads); promote green procurement practices as well as building public awareness about sustainable food production can be crucial for circular economy market development.



Transforming food policies to ensure nobody gets left behind

