

Summary of the first meeting of the Scientific Group of the Food Systems Summit of the UN Secretary-General's 2021

Date: July 27, 2:00-3:40 EST, held via Zoom

Attending members of the Scientific Group: Kaosar Afsana, Ousmane Badiane, Joachim von Braun, Patrick Caron, Martin Cole, Ismahane Elouafi, Frank A. Ewert, Louise O. Fresco, Mohamed Hassan, Mario Herrero Acosta, Thomas W. Hertel, Elizabeth Hodson de Jaramillo, Marta Hugas, Andrew Kambugu, Kaoru Kitajima, Rattan Lal, Hoesung Lee, Uma Lele, Lynnette M. Neufeld, Urs Niggli, Claudia Sadoff, Jean- François Soussana, Morakot Tanticharoen, Maximo Torero, Aman Wirakartakusumah, David Zilbermann

Members of the Scientific Group who were unable to join: Sheryl L. Hendriks, Jikun Huang, Lisa Sennerby Forsse

Special Guests: Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy of the Food Systems Summit

Other attendees: Heike Baumüller (ZEF), Katharina Gallant (ZEF), Jamie Morrison (FAO)

Preparatory documents sent to the Members prior to meeting:

- 2021 Food Systems Summit Overview
- Meeting Note – First Advisory Committee Meeting
- Action Tracks
- Scientific Group - Bios
- On scientific Group (Presentation for agenda item 3)

Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome and purpose of meeting
2. Round of introduction by all members
3. Review of TOR of the Scientific Group and implementation (Chair's presentation; TOR had been shared before)
4. Address by the Special Envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit, Agnes Kalibata
5. Calendar of activities and AOB

Re 1. Welcome and purpose of meeting

The meeting started out with Joachim von Braun cordially greeting all attendees of this first meeting of the Scientific Group. He clarified the purpose of the meeting as the starting point of shaping the evidence-based foundation of the Food Systems Summit (FSS). This virtual meeting served as a way of allowing group members to get to know each other, to review the TOR, and to identify first steps of the tasks ahead. Joachim von Braun expressed his gratitude to the vice chairs of the Group, Kaosar Afsana, Louise O. Fresco, and Mohamed Hassan, all of whom contribute to shaping the agenda of committee meetings.

Re 2. Round of introduction by all members

Following the second point on the agenda, all members as well as Jamie Morrison (Director of Food Systems Program at FAO and seconding in Food Systems Secretariat team to support this group) briefly introduced themselves, and Joachim von Braun presented those members who were not able to attend the call. Members participating in the meeting highlighted their expectations of how their individual expertise in the field of food systems will contribute to the work of the Group in preparation of the FSS. Furthermore, attending members expressed their appreciation and excitement about being part of this group of experts.

Introductions of professional backgrounds synopsis the information available in the list of bios (cf. preparatory documents). The focus on expected areas of contribution, however, highlighted areas of interests and strengths of the Group as well as assumed challenges of the way ahead. Aspects of competencies, concerns and scientific interests were expressed, including the following (please note these are not statements of Scientific Group consensus but summary of individual statements):

- **Competencies:** Aspects of food systems represented by the individual group members' expertise, include for instance food and nutrition security; food production; food processing and manufacturing; crops and biodiversity; livestock; natural resources, particularly water, soil, and forests; ecology and landscape science; social and economic dimensions (poverty, wellbeing, gender); health services and public health; community management; to sustainability, resources and energy; climate change; technology; farmers' traditional knowledge; international relations and trade; modelling systems transformations.
- **Geographical areas of focus:** The Scientific Group comprises experts from multiple different continents and reflects great experience in focusing on marginalized environments in the Global South.
- **SDGs:** Meeting the SDGs is endangered and therefore a new trajectory is needed. The food systems perspectives must be explicitly linked to actions in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030. This importantly includes looking into climate crisis and also to investigate the possibilities to deal with it. It was highlighted that pursuing a systems perspective implies to address tradeoffs between the individual systems components.
- **Approaching the future of food systems:** The past has been dedicated to understanding food and nutrition security, the next ten years should focus on solving the problems at hand. It is thereby necessary to take into account the rapid changes occurring, for instance, in Africa.
- **Looking for ways to apply established insights might not suffice but should be complimented with an anticipatory perception, ideally by working with concrete examples (case studies) as evidence for a possible way ahead.**
- **Modern science can contribute to transforming food systems through evidence and insights, for instance, including biology and bioeconomy. In general, different approaches must be integrated, solutions must be interdisciplinary and trans-sectoral, connecting the global and the local. Accordingly, it is crucial that all stakeholders be included and mobilized to transform the food systems.**
- **Transforming food systems (suggested solutions):** Local communities, industry, science (universities, academies), and governments were identified as stakeholders all of whom would need to be included and activated to transform food systems. To improve the livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalized communities, new crops are needed and old crops may need to be reintroduced, thus increasing biodiversity.
- **Nature-based solutions may be suitable solutions to produce more outputs with fewer inputs, to use and protect biodiversity in different regions for an efficient, resilient, and sustainable**

production. There is a general need to promote a change of systems towards resilience and sustainability.

- Summit: The Summit itself should not just be aspirational but should focus on actions in its findings, recommendations, and conclusions. To shape the necessary focus on action and navigate based on existent agreements like the Paris Declaration and the SDGs, critical reflection and tangible actions are necessary. This will be pursued through the Action Tracks in which the group members will be working.
- Expected challenges: Scientific advice is often not translated into policy making. At times, there is scientific controversy, or the scientific perspective does not match public perceptions or political interests.

Re 3. Review of TOR of the Scientific Group and implementation (Chair's presentation; TOR had been shared before)

The third point on the agenda was the review of the TOR of the Scientific Group and their anticipated implementation. For this purpose, the Chair, Joachim von Braun, gave a short presentation (cf. preparatory documents). He highlighted the crucial role of scientific evidence to inform, thus positioning the Scientific Group and its work at the center of the Summit content. The Group itself as an independent organ shall foster interdisciplinarity and inclusivity. Moreover, it shall include a feedback loop to the actual implementation of the Summit, amongst other through working on the Action Tracks.

A proposal for the work on the Action Tracks was announced for the aftermath of the meeting. Joachim von Braun proposed to decentralize the Scientific Group through assigning its members to the Action Tracks based on their individual backgrounds and interests. The created subgroups should then directly engage with Action Tracks headed by international experts and the UN Agencies (for instance track No. 1 by FAO). At the same time, it will be crucial to pay tribute to synergies and to keep other challenges, for instance, the current pandemic in mind.

After the presentation, the vice chairs of the group gave a quick feedback.

Mohamed Hassan stressed the high quality of independent scientific evidence that is necessary to obtain and to be integrated with related issues such that, for instance, the nexus between food systems, energy and health (COVID-19) is addressed. Many organizations and networks have come up with concrete recommendations and best practices, which should be highlighted and shared from the perspective of this Group.

Kaosar Afsana drew attention to the importance to consider the role of global partnerships and regional partnerships within the food systems. These partnerships could benefit from achievements of the Scientific Group and the Summit. She suggested revisiting traditional food systems research to identify traditional practices. Each and every person should recognize their accountability for what humans have been doing to food systems, environment, and health. The interconnected nature of the issues at hand are reflected in the SDGs and are at the core of this Group's work and systems perspective.

Louise O. Fresco stressed that the main challenge will be not to reinvent the wheel but to focus on how science can make a decisive difference, also regarding political or ethical aspects. Furthermore, she suggested to include in the definition of food systems how science can contribute to transforming food systems in the context of choices and evidence.

Joachim von Braun further highlighted the huge opportunity for science communities and the Scientific Group to contribute to shaping sustainable development through the Food Systems Summit 2021. He

stressed that the Group should consider both, first, the role of science to contribute to the evidence base of the Summit, and second the intrinsic role of science fostering new insights and innovations. The former requires the constructive engagement by the Scientific Group in all Summit processes to facilitate evidence base. The latter needs long term investments in complex science as a key contribution to help transform food systems toward sustainable ones, serving all people.

Re 4. Address by the Special Envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit, Agnes Kalibata

Fourth on the agenda was the Address by the Special Envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit, Agnes Kalibata. She expressed her appreciation of the great expertise inherent to this Group and stressed that she is looking forward to their joint work based on the foundation laid by the Terms of Reference. The Scientific Group should acknowledge both the challenges and opportunities linked to food systems. The Group's work should focus on evidence that is currently being developed but also on innovations related to different groups of people. At this point in history, science is facing huge challenges but also has at its disposal huge innovations to build on to develop the way ahead.

Re 5. Calendar of activities and AOB

The final item on the agenda were closing remarks and sketching the way forward. Joachim von Braun announced that a summary of this meeting will be distributed.

He will propose group formations for the Scientific Group's subgroups related to the five Action Tracks.

Special meetings with those members who were unable to attend this meeting will be scheduled. The same applies to individual follow-up meetings if desired.

Members are asked to send a note to Joachim von Braun as a follow-up to this meeting including (i) comments on his presentation,

(ii) comments on statements of colleagues, and

(iii) elaborating points which were made during the meeting but touched upon too briefly to do them justice. These notes will be collected in the appendix of the meeting summary.

The next video conference shall take place in the second half of September. Technological challenges of this current meeting will be solved, and the different time zones of the group members will be regarded.

Joachim von Braun commented that if it had not been for COVID-19, the group would have spent two days together to become acquainted and discuss the work ahead. Should the pandemic allow for it, in-person meetings might be aimed for in 2021. For the time being, virtual communication is necessary and encouraged among all members of the Group.