



The Scientific Group for the
UN Food Systems Summit
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Scientific Group Report Summary

SHIFT TO HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

by

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Action Track 2 works to catalyse a shift in consumer behaviour that will create and build demand for sustainably produced agri- and ocean food products, strengthen shorter value chains, promote circular use of food resources, helping to reduce waste and improve nutrition, especially among the most vulnerable. This Action Track recognises that current food consumption patterns, often characterised by higher levels of food waste and a transition in diets towards higher energy, more resource-intensive foods, need to be transformed. At the same time we recognise that context is everything, and the perils and problems of different countries in terms of a nutrition transition will need to be evaluated and solved with an array of different solutions appropriate to their local conditions, culture and values.

Food systems in both developed and developing countries are changing rapidly. Increasingly characterized by a high degree of vertical integration, evolutions in food systems are being driven by new technologies that are changing production processes, distribution systems, marketing strategies, and the food products that people eat. These changes offer the opportunity for system-wide change in the way in which production interacts with the environment, giving greater attention to the ecosystem services offered by the food sector.

However, developments in food systems also pose new challenges and controversies. Food system changes have responded to shifts in consumer preferences towards larger shares of more animal-sourced and processed foods in diets, raising concerns regarding the caloric and nutritional content of many food items. By increasing food availability, lowering prices and increasing quality standards, they have also induced greater food waste at the consumer end. In addition, the risk of fast transmission of food-borne disease and food-related health risks throughout the food chain has increased and the ecological footprint of the global food system continues to grow in terms of energy, resource use, and impact on climate change.

The negative consequences of food systems from a nutritional, environmental and livelihood perspective are increasingly being recognized by consumers in some regions. With growing consumer awareness, driven by concerns about the environmental and health impacts of investments and current supply chain technologies and practices, and by a desire among new generations of city dwellers to reconnect with their rural heritage and to use their own behaviour to drive positive change, opportunities exist to define and establish added-value products that are capable of internalising social or environmental delivery within their price.

These forces can be used to fundamentally reshape food systems by stimulating coordinated government action in changing the regulatory environment that in turn incentivises improved private sector investment decisions.

The evidence is abundantly clear, without shifts in consumption patterns towards health and sustainability we will fail to achieve multiple SDGs, we will fail to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement, the post 2020 biodiversity goals and we will lose the opportunity to reposition food as our best bet for improving health and regenerating the environment. Achieving these transitions and managing the trade-offs and synergies will require additional attention to many facets of food systems, including: (a) food environments; (b) addressing food safety issues across value chains; (c) local producers and value chains, income and land inequality; (d) the role of trade in open and closed economies; (e) the political economy of food; (f) modifying behavioural changes; and (g) reducing

food loss and waste and embracing circularity.

Solutions to enable the shift towards more sustainable consumption need to be defined around cross cutting levers connecting policy reform, coordinated investment, accessible financing, innovation, traditional knowledge, governance, data and evidence, and empowerment. Achieving healthy diets from sustainable food systems is complex and requires a multi-pronged approach. Actions necessary include awareness-raising, behaviour change interventions in food environments, food education, strengthened urban-rural linkages, improved product design, investments in food system innovations, public private partnerships, public procurement, and separate collection enabling alternative uses of food waste can all contribute to this transition. Local and national policy-makers and small and large scale private sector actors have a key role in both responding to and shaping the market opportunities created by changing consumer demands.

The Scientific Group Papers for the UN Food Systems Summit are shared with the aim of providing information and facilitating discussion for transparent and evidence-based Summit preparations. The full paper can be accessed at <https://sc-fss2021.org/materials/scientific-group-reports-and-briefs>. Authors' affiliations are listed there as well.

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