



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

ADVANCE EQUITABLE LIVELIHOODS

by

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Food systems transformation provides the opportunity to shift current trends in all forms of malnutrition, prioritizing nutritious food availability and affordability for all – from shifting priorities in agricultural production, to improved food systems that favour nutrition and sustainability. The task of Action Track 4 is to explore approaches to doing so that will ensure equitable livelihoods for producers, businesses, workers across the food system and consumers, with particular emphasis on addressing inequalities and power imbalances.

The most effective way to sustainably eradicate poverty and inequality is to boost the opportunities and capacities of the poor and those living in situations of vulnerability, through redistributing resources more equitably (e.g., land, incomes, social protection), ensuing quality education, progressive and not regressive taxation, state infrastructure investments among other approaches. There is no linear relationship between productivity, production and income, food security, or reduced inequalities. Decision-making must also become more equitable and accountable to those who are most negatively affected by our current food system and their outcomes. Progress in advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution therefore involve several key areas ranging from expanding access to assets, infrastructure, and services as well as other required measures to enhance quality of living spaces. Interventions to produce real change on

the ground need to empower the poor and those living situations of vulnerability.

As the Science Group for AT 4, we explore the nature of these issues, using the drivers of food systems as articulated by the High Level Panel of Experts of the UN Committee on World Food Security¹ as framing. Small and medium sized producers and people living on the food system in rural and urban areas are disproportionately affected by all **bio-physical and environmental drivers** including soil and water resources, and climate change. Unequal opportunity in access to all types of resources reduces overall production, resilience, rural transformation. Advances in **innovation, technology and infrastructure** have had important impacts on food production and sustainability, transportation and processing along food value chains, marketing, and ultimately diets, including consumption of both nutritious and unhealthy foods. But achievement of equitable livelihoods in food systems will require that issues of access to contextually suitable innovation and technology be substantially enhanced, and that such advances better build on and learn from indigenous knowledge. Many **economic and political factors** are essential causes of inequality and power imbalances at household, community, national and global levels, which constrain the ability of food systems transformation to deliver poverty reduction and sustainable, equitable livelihoods. Finally, vast evidence illustrates that several

socio-cultural and demographic drivers underpin inequalities among and within societies and constrain the potential for some to benefit from actions to improve livelihoods, particularly women, youth, disabled, elderly, and indigenous peoples. These issues are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is having a significant impact on the global commodity markets and trading systems, economic growth, incomes, and poverty levels, with likely disproportionate burden on the vulnerable communities in both urban and rural areas. This is likely to worsen inequalities and undernutrition including child wasting.²

The growth of the food systems presents enormous employment opportunities, but achievement of equitable livelihoods in food systems and resulting from changes in food systems will require that substantial progress be made to address the drivers of inequality. Food system transformation must also find the balance of food systems that favour and support healthy diets³ (i.e., those that minimize risk of both undernutrition and overweight and obesity) and do so in ways that are sustainable for the planet. We must transform not only food systems, but the structures and systems that continue to enable and exacerbate inequities. Drivers of food systems inequities are highly interconnect-

ed and progress to address one will likely require change across several. For example, globalization and trade interact with other powerful drivers, especially technology resource mobilization, and demographic trends, which shape food production, distribution, and consumption. Drawing of this evidence review, we believe therefore, that enhancing equitable livelihoods will require solutions that: (i) are rights-based; (ii) ensure long-term investment for structural changes; (iii) directly inform local and national policy and programmes; and (iv) enhance the development of and equitable deployment of contextually relevant innovation and technology.

We share a series of recommendations aimed to enhance inclusive decision making, protect the livelihoods of those living in situations of vulnerability while creating opportunities, adapting institutions and policies to favour equitable food systems livelihoods, and increasing investment to realize the potential of improved institutional and policy actions. We invite governments, businesses, and organizations to hold themselves and others to account for ensuring equitable livelihoods, and open avenues to realize the potential of science, innovation, technology, and evidence to favour equitable livelihoods.

¹ HLPE. Nutrition and Food Systems. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome; 2017. Report No.: 12.

² Headey D, Heidkamp R, Osendarp S, Ruel M, Scott N, Black R, Shekar M, Bouis H, Flory A, Haddad L, et al. Impacts of COVID-19 on childhood malnutrition and nutrition-related mortality. *The Lancet Elsevier*; 2020; 396:519–21.

³ Neufeld LM, Hendriks S, Hugas M. Healthy diet: A definition for the United Nations Food Systems Summit [Internet]. 2021 Mar p. 12. Available from: <https://sc-fss2021.org/>

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