

Ninth Meeting of the UNFSS Scientific Group (ScGroup)

21 July 2021, 14.00-16.00 (CET)

Meeting Notes

Agenda of the Meeting (Meeting agenda was shared with the participants prior to the meeting)

1. 14.00-14:30 Follow up to “Science Days” of the UNFSS
2. 14:30-15:00 Update on Pre-Summit of the UNFSS
3. 15:00-15:30 The revised Scientific Group’s Strategic Paper
5. 15:30-15:45 Emerging Agenda of the summit and the follow-up to the summit
6. 15:45-16:00 Any other business

Follow up the “Science Days” of the UNFSS

The Chairperson of the ScGroup, Joachim von Braun, opened the meeting and thanked the participants for their participation. ScGroup Vice Chair Louise Fresco, and members Ousmane Badiane and David Zilberman were unable to attend the meeting due to prior engagements.

The Chairperson invited an open discussion on the event “Science Days” organized by the ScGroup on 8-9th July 2021 and the on the forty side-events organized by the partners of the ScGroup leading up to the Science Days. He informed the participants that a synthesis report of the Science Days is under preparation. Detailed notes of the event were taken and propositions relevant for the UNFSS agenda and beyond are being synthesized in the report. The Chair asked the participants to share their feedback on the event. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised by the members:

- Several mentioned a generally very positive assessment of Science Days.
- The diversity of perspectives and diversity of partners at the event and of the side-events was appreciated by the wider community.
- The event was also appreciated for its openness and inclusivity.
- The event also helped build trust in the UNFSS agenda setting process.

The key propositions for the UNFSS from the discussions on the Science Days, the following were highlighted in the meeting:

- Strengthening science-policy interface on food systems at national, regional, and global levels should be highlighted in the strategic paper as well as in the summit agenda.
- Food Systems’ transformation requires and includes investment in food systems’ related research and innovation.
- The Summit agenda should call on government commitment to R&D funding.
- A call for assisting LMICs in research and in investment in food systems related research and innovation.

- In-depth science related to niche themes/topics and particular technologies and innovations were not discussed during the Science Days. Diversity of the audience's backgrounds did not allow this conversation.

Agenda Item 2: Update on the Pre-Summit

The ScGroup is organizing a session titled “Science and Innovation for Food Systems: Serving People and Planet” at the Pre-summit of the UNFSS to be held on July 29th. The session will be held on July 26th at 12:00-13:30 CEST. Members of the ScGroup including the ScGroup Chair and the three Vice Chairs will participate in the session. ScGroup members will also participate in other sessions. Participants saw the Pre-summit as an opportunity to highlight the points raised in the strategic paper by the ScGroup. The event was seen by the participants as an opportunity for the members to highlight marginalized topics.

Agenda 3: Scientific Group's Strategic Paper

Participants were updated on the progress of the strategic paper of the ScGroup; comments on the draft circulated around the Science Days were received. Comments were received from governments, academics, and civil society organizations. The paper being revised in light of these comments.

The Vice Chairs ScGroup, Mohamed Hasan and Kaosar Afsana briefed the participants on the revision process. They noted that the paper is drawing attention to making science and technology inclusive and engagement with indigenous knowledge.

In the discussion following the Chair's introduction and the Vice Chair's remarks, the following points were raised by the ScGroup members:

- The trade-offs in food systems transformation; for example, the differential perspectives on fertilizer and pesticide in relation to food systems and biodiversity need to be explicitly acknowledged.
- Similarly, transforming food systems and investing in food systems related research and innovation is costly and governments may face trade-offs with other investments such as tackling climate change.
- Insufficient attention has been paid to agroecology and agroecological perspectives to food systems transformation.
- The strategic paper lists areas of intervention/transformation but does not indicate the priorities. Itemizing priorities can help policy makers in choosing the set of policies and in taking concrete steps.
- The effective ways to make innovations a public good and innovations to effectively deliver innovations in science and technology should be made part of the strategic paper.

The revised draft of the strategic paper will be re-circulated among the ScGroup, the Chair invited written comments on the revised draft. He invited participants to suggest deletions to help maintain focus on the most immediate concerns.

Agenda 4: Emerging Agenda of the summit and the follow-up to the summit

The Chair and the Vice Chairs floated the idea of suggesting a **UN convention on food for consideration by the Summit**. The Vice-Chairs noted that conversations on food, climate

and biodiversity might be made more effective if in addition to climate and biodiversity, food getting attention by a UN convention. The Chairs endorsed the idea of a UN convention on food systems.

Additional **post-summit** steps to ensure that the momentum built around food systems transformation is not lost after the UNFSS in September 2021 were also discussed. Four possible organizational structures were proposed for a sustained post-summit engagement of science on the food systems agenda; 1. a light support structure for a year following the summit 2. Coordinated follow-up and implementation imbedded in existing intergovernmental processes and in the UN Reform process based in Rome-based UN agencies. 3. Focus on country action 4. Blending international momentum with country-driven action. Some expressed support for putting up a light structure with a small, well-designed group over a one-year horizon to appraise the post-summit global and national actions post UNFSS. Others favored option 4.

Attention was also drawn to issue-based coalitions in the UNFSS processes. The role of the ScGroup in coalition was also opened for discussion.

The following points were raised in the open discussion on the structure of the post-summit follow-up and the role of ScGroup:

- The UNFSS has an ambitious agenda; a longer time horizon than one-year may be needed for a follow-up structure/institution.
- Continuing the engagement of science in the UNFSS follow-up will be a challenge but must be ensured, the ScGroup has a key role in this regard.
- A permanent secretariat focusing on the role of science and combined with/within one of the existing institutions can be explored as an option.
- Strengthening and institutionalizing the role of regional and global academies of sciences should be helpful.
- An annual global event/international conference can be organized to present new evidence, new knowledge, new technologies and for sharing successful and unsuccessful experiences.
- The call for coalition buildings, and the issues around coalitions are not all grounded in science. One way to ensure the inclusion of science in coalition building and that coalitions are built around issues that have scientific bases, is to actively engage in the coalition building process rather than reviewing coalitions at a later stage. That way, The Scientific Group can play its role in shaping coalitions.
- The Chair asked Martin Cole, Chairperson CFS-HLPE to share **his vision on the role of CFS-HLPE in the post-UNFSS follow up agenda**. Martin Cole suggested that the structures/institutions in place for science-policy dialogue should be strengthened including the CFS-HLPE and Rome-based agencies. ScGroup should also advise the summit agenda on the “how-to” of strengthening science-policy interface

Agenda 5 Any other business

The Chair drew attention to the upcoming dates of ScGroup meetings already shared before.

The Chair closed the meeting with thanking the ScGroup members for their engagement in the task of assuring an evidence-based summit.

The meeting closed at 16:00 h CET.