

Options for an IPCC for food need careful consideration

The recent critique from IPES-Food by Clapp et al (July 2021)¹ is protesting prematurely, assuming too much about what might be proposed, and too readily judging that it would be dominated by vested interests (the antithesis of academy values).

While the polemics of the IPES-Food paper seem to want to polarise discussion, this is unlikely to be productive. It would be far better to engage with all views and examine the evidence, to seek the way forward, perhaps piloting innovation to better understand the critical success factors for an improving science-policy interface. Parenthetically, the paper criticises the procedures of the UN FSS Scientific Group but IPES-Food membership itself seems to be self-selected.

There is indeed much to be done transparently to examine options:

- An IPCC-like intergovernmental body for the food system is one possibility but potentially suffers from weaknesses that should be addressed (inflexibility, slowness, difficulty in making controversial recommendations). The InterAcademy Partnership (IAP, <https://www.interacademies.org/>) has previously assessed IPCC procedures and this might help to form a basis for further consideration of the IPCC-like option.
- Food related science issues cut across many disciplines. Connecting various other scientific advisory mechanisms to an intergovernmental mechanism for food might be conceived and could strengthen ownership. The IPBES type mechanism could be considered too. Possibly by connecting to multiple parts of the UN and other international bodies (e.g. G7 and G20, also unnecessarily denigrated by IPES-Food) as IAP has done, could also be considered. Furthermore, the international science – policy interface needs to connect to national systems as food systems are very diverse.

What is needed now is to consult further on options without preconceptions – perhaps this should be the recommendation for the UN FSS.

Perhaps IAP might now reach out to other science-based organisations to discuss further. IAP's own Science Days side-event included productive discussion.

Further IAP discussion with ISC and others might help to identify new ways to engage with the UN system and develop advisory platforms, and HLPE CGIAR and others should be part of such discussions.

Volker ter Meulen and Robin Fears

IAP Side-event organisers for UN FSS Science Days

¹ AN 'IPCC FOR FOOD'? How the UN Food Systems Summit is being used to advance a problematic new science-policy agenda http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/GovBrief.pdf