Food systems transformation requires a paradigm shift and robust systemic reforms to address growing challenges related to hunger, malnutrition, rural poverty, and environmental changes. The COVID-19 pandemic had a strong negative impact on agrifood systems, with most of the related SDG indicators worsening over the last two years. Moreover, COVID-19 forced countries to concentrate on urgent policy responses, reducing fiscal space for long-term planning and increasing austerity measures and policies and economic downturns. In a context of growing multi-risks, the war in Ukraine accelerates negative trends, threatening global food production and security, already under stress given climate change, biodiversity, and natural and human-made disasters.

Against this background of increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, agrifood systems need to transform themselves to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Constant and unpredicted change is the norm in agrifood value chains and innovative out-of-the-box management approaches are needed to address them. Governments will need an “all hands on deck” approach to achieve the SDGs, transform agrifood systems and evaluate priorities through participatory methods that value inclusivity and assess trade-offs.

The SDGs are grounded in human rights; their integrated, indivisible, and interlinked nature requires an in-depth discussion of the interconnections between the various SDGs and their respective targets. Actions to drive progress towards one target may influence positive progress or cause positive or negative unintended consequences on others. Scientific evidence, analytical research, technology, and innovation are needed to improve policy making and implementation and monitor progress on the SDGs to understand the best ways to optimize synergies and minimize trade-offs with transformative impact, if holistic lenses are appropriately applied. For example, FAO’s State of the World’s Forests 2022 report outlines how forests and trees have the potential to provide solutions across a range of SDGs beyond SDG15. Solutions that can create jobs and income, especially in rural areas, and help stop climate change and biodiversity loss simultaneously, e.g., through agroforestry or restoring the productivity of the land.

As producers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, consumers, and decision-makers, women play a critical role in agrifood systems. Globally women comprise over 37 percent of the world’s rural agricultural workforce, a ratio that rises to 48 percent for low-income countries. They also participate considerably in other sub-sectors such as livestock, fisheries, and forestry. Yet, the food security and nutrition need of rural women and girls are frequently overlooked, especially in households with patriarchal norms or where policy considerations do not fully incorporate a gender focus. Evidence across all continents shows that women are more food insecure than men, mainly because they are socially, economically, and politically disempowered. This has worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic and further exacerbated the gender care gap. FAO’s 2021 State of Food Security and Nutrition Report finds that globally the gender gap in food insecurity reached 10% in 2020, compared to 6% in 2019. However, despite being left behind, women act as resilience builders and guardians of household food security, nutrition, and traditional agricultural knowledge, which is vital for successfully mitigating economic and environmental shocks.

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Rural people are responsible for a large share of food production and are custodians of natural resources and biodiversity management. However, many remain marginalized. Addressing the multiple barriers and constraints that small-scale economic actors face is essential for enabling increased incomes, improved nutrition and livelihoods, climate change adaptation, sustainable management of natural resources and preservation of biodiversity. Agrifood networks present an opportunity to support inclusive and sustainable rural transformation while addressing urban and rural food security, nutrition, rights, and inequalities.

This side event showcases opportunities to support the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda through transitioning towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life. To be successful, this strategy must be implemented through innovative partnerships that value trust-building, system thinking, coherent governance at all levels and embrace a multi-solving lens in food systems transformations. The panel will be organized in collaboration with representatives from the wider UN system and from National Conveners, who will showcase their efforts to design and implement National Pathways for Food Systems transformations, a country led policy plans to accelerate efforts to transform food systems, submitted by several Member Countries in the context of the 2021 Food Systems Summit. These Pathways can build shortcuts to accelerate the 2030 Agenda, especially in transforming agri-food systems through capacity development and women’s and youth empowerment, preserving natural resources, biodiversity, and the environmental sustainability.

OPENING

- Mr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. - The opportunity of agrifood systems transformations to build forward better

ROUND TABLE:

CO-CREATING THE FUTURE FOR A HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY THROUGH AGRIFOOD TRANSFORMATIONS

Impact Panel:
Agrifood systems and SDGs in an environment of increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The panel will address the following themes:
- Investing in gender equality and environmental protection for inclusive agrifood systems: assessing progress in land control, access to finance and natural resources control
- Understanding Trade-offs and synergies between multiple SDGs to ensure food security and environmental protection in times of conflict

Panelists:
- Ms. Åsa Regné, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women Deputy Executive Director
- Ms Ligia Noronha, Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) New York Office
- UN Speaker TBC

Dialogue with countries: Lessons from country-level experiences dealing with agrifood systems transformations
- Representatives from countries (TBC) and food systems thought leaders

CLOSING: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- UN Speaker TBC