



## From the CEO: Ishmael Sunga



This issue is entirely devoted to farmers and the UNFSS (United Nations Food Systems Summit).

Preparations for the engagement of farmers in the 2021 UNFSS have gathered momentum. Until recently, our engagement has largely been through our involvement in various global processes, structures and platforms, including the global UNFSS Champions Network (which I am part of), our participation in the Action Tracks, World Economic Food Systems Initiative, the Food and Land Use Coalition, as well as the producer engagement group which has representation of, among others, the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO), the Pan African Farmers' Organisation (PAFO), and farmers' associations from Asia.

One of the key concerns emanating from these engagements is the relatively low representation of farmers' voices in this process. Considering that farmers are central to food systems locally and globally, this has led to an urgent call to increase and

intensify the engagement of farmers in relevant dialogues. As SACAU, we have taken this call very seriously and are up for the challenge.

In this regard, we kicked off our UNFSS farmer mobilisation and engagement support with a virtual regional members consultation workshop in April. The purpose of the workshop was to position farmers' organisations (FOs) and their members to effectively participate and engage in UNFSS processes at national, continental and global levels. More specifically, it sought (among others) to enhance appreciation of the summit and key issues at stake, empower members, and develop key advocacy and communication messages for the summit.

Being an internal consultation process, the main participants in the workshop were member representatives at leadership level, youth and women, and the SACAU Board and Secretariat. They were joined by a few carefully selected speakers who were also invited, to provide background and context. In this regard, we were privileged to be addressed by Dr Agnes Kalibata, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the UNFSS.

Other eminent speakers were Dr David Nabarro (WHO COVID-19 Special Envoy, Chair of Global Health and Co-Director at IGHI Imperial College London, Strategic Director: 4SD Leadership Mentoring, and Senior Adviser: Food Systems Summit Dialogues), Mr Sean De Cleene (World Economic Forum Executive Committee member), Mr Ajay Vir Jakhari (Chairman of Bharat Krishi Samaj - Indian Farmers Forum and UN Food Systems Summit Action track 2 Vice Chair), Dr Theo de Jager (World Farmers' Organisation President and past president of SACAU), Mr Martin Bwalya (Head: Industrialisation Division for the New Partnership for Africa Development) and Dr Sinare (SACAU President). They were all in one room, virtually speaking.

In my opening address, I observed that – certainly from a farmers' perspective – food systems are broken, and highlighted the following major fault lines, dichotomies and ironies:

- Smallholder farmers are the most undernourished segment of society, yet they are largely responsible for feeding the global population.
- The majority of farmers are poverty-stricken despite the food industry being one of the biggest in the world.
- Farmers provide essential ecosystem management services of a public nature, but they are yet to receive fitting financial compensation.
- Food is often stripped of its nutrients during “value-addition” processes, somewhere along the post-farm supply chain. But then farmers bear the brunt, despite having delivered the food with its natural nutrients intact.

- Though there are various value chain actors, it's farmers who bear the financial aftermath when disaster strikes – whether in the form of natural calamities or market failure.
- Farmers produce in response to demand from other chain actors, yet they are the only ones held accountable for the negative environmental impact caused by farming practices. Surely every value chain actor is complicit?

I also underscored the fact that the onus rests largely on the farmers' constituency to create the food systems they wish for.

There was overwhelming support by SACAU members for the UNFSS, as well as interest in proactive engagement in related processes and structures.

The pandemic has been crucial in amplifying existing structural imperfections and the fragility of food systems. I also observed that, rather fortuitously, the pandemic had helped to systematically dismantle food systems, a feat that could not have been successfully engineered by human effort (short of a revolution). So, let's not underestimate the value of this unique opportunity or worse, let it go to waste.

Enjoy the read.

## **TRANSFORMING OUR FOOD SYSTEMS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS AND PRODUCERS**



The main theme of Dr Agnes Kalibata's address centred on opportunities for farmers and producers to transform our food systems.

Expressing her lingering concern around the lack of involvement of farmers in the UNFSS process, Dr Kalibata stated an aspiration for the Food Systems Summit to provide a platform for farmers' voices to be heard, their solutions to be shared, and for significant changes to the system that will empower farmers.

Here's what her presentation hinged on:

**Food systems have had a dual purpose of response and recovery within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has simply highlighted gaps that were already prevalent in food systems, Kalibata pointed out.

Failing food systems have a knock-on effect on education, health, the various economies, as well as human rights, peace and security. And, disturbingly, it is those who work in agriculture and make their living from the land who are often the hardest hit. Two-thirds of the 900 million people living in extreme poverty are agricultural workers and their dependents. This is a grave injustice, she exclaimed.

The Food Systems Summit provides a unique opportunity to rebalance our food systems value chain. It's an opportunity to unleash ambitious new actions, innovative solutions, and plans to transform our food systems, in order to leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

**Farmers are at the centre of transforming food systems, warranting their voices being amplified.**

Extending an invitation to FOs to share their pain points and “what you want the world to stop doing, what you want to bring to the Summit”, Kalibata also highlighted the impact of day-to-day actions on the sustainability of food systems.

In order for the summit to manifest desired changes, she urged FOs to:

- engage in the national member states dialogues in their country
- ask SACAU to facilitate more independent regional multi-stakeholder dialogues
- share their thoughts on the solutions
- join any of the three public forums that were scheduled to take place during the month of May.

**Food systems comprise various groups – governments, the private sector, scientists, academics and civil society organisations – whose interests and proposed solutions may not necessarily align.**

Kalibata encouraged FOs to maximise the fact that the summit will be conducive to capturing the diversity inherent in the farmers' constituency, its diverse range of contributions to food systems, as well as its diverse set of requirements from other stakeholders in the food systems.

In conclusion, Kalibata stated, “To advance toward a reformed food system there will need to be compromise from all parties. The time to act and get engaged is now.”

# EXPLORING FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION THROUGH MULTI- STAKEHOLDERS' DIALOGUE



Dr David Nabarro's presentation on this topic was centred around five points.

The Food Systems Summit is an important milestone for sustainable development.

Nabarro kicked off by stating that "The UNFSS places food at the centre of all efforts to secure a decent future for all people, and our planet." He went on to highlight as a caveat for achieving the sustainable development goals, the clear understanding of "what the food systems of the future will look like". Nabarro added that the approaching summit provides a critical moment to define just that. He also underscored the opportunity that the summit presents to define how we can journey together to ensure our food systems work for everyone, everywhere.

## **Complex systems like food can shift through multi-stakeholder dialogue.**

Importantly, Nabarro pointed out the complexity of food systems, comprising "multiple, often quite powerful actors, and many with competing perspectives". It is this very fact, he said, that complicates the process of trying to find convergence around converting our food system to one that is both equitable and sustainable.

Nabarro has first-hand experience in multi-stakeholder dialogues being a useful way to appreciate the diversity of perspectives in food systems. These are often organised successively. The Food Systems Summit Dialogues offer opportunities to broaden participants' understanding and to identify pathways towards convergence through the mobilisation of new coalitions around concrete solutions, he confirmed.

## **The Food Systems Summit Dialogues**

Food Systems Summit Dialogues are geared to promote the inclusion of all stakeholders and they reflect the reality that food systems do, in fact affect all people. The dialogues comprise a variety of invited participants drawn from different stakeholder groups, who have a range of roles within food systems.

During each dialogue, participants are divided into small diverse groups and encouraged to articulate their vision for how food systems should function by 2030. A designated facilitator then directs inclusive exploration and exchanges around issues that are carefully framed, with adequate scope for open interactions in an environment characterised by mutual respect and trust.

### ***The three types of food systems summit dialogues:***

#### *Independent dialogues*

Independent dialogues allow anyone, anywhere the right and the opportunity to arrange a dialogue on the future of food systems, explained Nabarro. This, he said, makes them a crucial mechanism to ensure that everyone's voice is heard in preparation for the summit. At the time of his presentation, more than 300 independent dialogues, which are convened by diverse groups all over the world, had already been announced.

#### *Member state dialogues*

Member state dialogues are arranged by national governments, through which multiple stakeholders are given the opportunity to collaborate on shaping a pathway to food systems of the future in a given country. At the time of Nabarro's presentation, 110 governments had formally indicated that they would convene national dialogues. These dialogues comprise three stages: initiation, exploration and consolidation.

#### *Global dialogues*

The global summit dialogues are co-convened by Dr Agnes Kalibata, mainly to draw political attention to food systems in high-level, thematic and sectoral meetings and processes. These are focused on the environment, energy, water, the priorities of young people, and the blue economy (among others).

Dialogue resources are available in all UN languages (and in Portuguese), complemented by a weekly training and orientation programme for those fulfilling critical dialogue roles. For more information on the Food Systems Summit Dialogues, please visit: [www.summitdialogues.org](http://www.summitdialogues.org)

### **The critical role of farmers and food producers in dialogues**

Says Nabarro, "The UNFSS endeavours to reflect the interests of all stakeholders in food systems, and in this regard, all conveners of Food Systems Summit Dialogues are strongly encouraged to always include farmers and food producers in dialogues about the future of food systems." He also highlighted the equal importance of farmers and food producers or FOs convening their own dialogues and connecting them with national, regional, or indeed global processes.

This matters, because:

- Farmers and food producers manage more than 90% of farms around the world and produce about 80% of the world's food. They are the custodians of livestock, and stewards of the land – in the fields and the forests – and of marine and freshwater environments.
- Farmers ensure that the basic requirements for good food are made available to all.
- The food systems of the future must be good for all people and planet – and that includes being productive, commercially viable, equitable, sustainable and resilient to climate change and other shocks. Farmers and food producers will play a critical role in realising this ambition.

### **Engage imaginatively**

Though there's an open invitation for all stakeholders to engage in this summit, external factors like COVID-19, climate change, and conflict are an impediment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is everywhere and limits considerably our capacity to meet in person. This makes it particularly difficult to engage with stakeholders located in remote areas where access to reliable Internet is limited. Furthermore, climate change is ubiquitous and undermines farmers' ability to contribute meaningfully. Then there's the ongoing conflict that is affecting so many locations.

Therefore, Nabarro concluded by highlighting the critical need for innovative thinking and imaginative engagement in preparing for the summit. And in the same breath, he strongly discouraged the stance of "It is too difficult."

## **THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO FARMERS**



Reinventing food systems is no longer an option. And a food systems agenda that makes sense to all Southern African farmers is critical. This was part of Mr Sean De Cleene's talk during the workshop.

He highlighted 2021 as a “pivotal year for food” and drew attention to the fact that the pandemic has the world “changing on its axis”.

A systems approach is what will help the agricultural sector reach the desired scale of change, as well as achieve meaningful recovery. This has become a matter of urgency, for which the UNFSS provides the ideal platform.

In this context, De Cleene commended SACAU on its poultry initiative that goes beyond just improving the breeding of chickens. Rising above merely considering integrated value chains, the initiative reflects an integrated view that incorporates innovation, improved varieties, regional markets and trade implications. But it could go even further, he said, by for example, supporting the resilience of smallholder farmers, prioritising farmers’ and animals’ health, adopting digitisation.

Food and agriculture are key catalysts to returning to even a semblance of ‘normalcy’ post-COVID – mitigating against poverty and hunger, but also restoring the health of the planet.

Farmers becoming more nature-positive, and embracing sustainable farming practices remains a pipedream without suitable financing incentives. Also, the need remains for meaningful discourse around partnerships, for the farming constituency to respond cohesively to food systems issues.

Indeed, farmers are a part of a broader context. And to prevent their voices from getting lost in the bustle, they need to start steering discussions that will shape desired food systems, and harness their position as key actors.

## **FARMERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON BROKEN FOOD SYSTEMS**



Dr De Jager spoke fervently about the extent of the brokenness of food systems, allegations against farmers, and key farmers’ messages for the world and the summit.



## **Food systems**

The current state of food systems and the plight of farmers are lamentable: ironically, farmers form part of the nearly 900 million people who are living under the breadline; nearly 40% of the food that leaves farm gates doesn't reach consumers' plates (either going to waste or ending up unaccounted for); and the distribution of risk and reward is skewed (with farmers bearing the most risk).

## **The blame game**

At its core, agriculture clashes with nature. We can only strive to ensure that, as far as is possible, we pass the planet on to the next generation in a better state than when we found it.

Not everything that is wrong within the system is the farmers' fault. Wild fires and deforestation contribute significantly to climate change challenges, yet farmers are seen as the villains, citing greenhouse gas emissions caused as a result of methane produced from livestock grazing. On biodiversity, farmers are hauled over the coals for monocropping, predation, the treatment of insects and weeds, and so much more, De Jager said. Farmers are also blamed for pollution, fertilisers, agro chemicals and mechanisation.

And as for ensuring health and nutrition on consumers' plates, farmers' responsibility ends with ensuring that the food produced on the farm is the healthiest. The rest is up to the other value chain actors.

## **Business, not charity**

Why is business-driven agriculture being fingered as if it's a welfare case? De Jager asked rhetorically. Farmers' farms are their businesses – it's their livelihood.

Different farmers have different problems, challenges and needs.

"We mustn't let ourselves be lured into a dispensation with a one-size-fits-all solution to fix all agricultural problems in food systems," he continued in a cautionary tone.

De Jager then berated NGOs who are the drivers of this baseless narrative. They masquerade as FOs, yet the farmers who they supposedly represent don't even recognise them as such. In the food systems debate, we need to ensure that it's the actual farmers' voices that are being amplified to the world, he exclaimed. Farmers' organisations need to use their mandate to get involved in amplifying farmers' authentic voices.

To this end, SACAU, the World Farmers' Organisation, the Pan-African Farmers' Organisation and every other FO that could be reached have united to spark regional debates that will source solutions from the farmers themselves.

“Farmers know exactly what they can do better, and what is feasible for the sustainability of their enterprises.”

### **Plant-based vs animal protein**

Then there’s the widespread drive for a transition to a mainly plant-based diet, for which the generally proffered solution is a wholesale move to regenerative agriculture and organic farming. But how can this be successfully implemented in the absence of a pilot project to test if the 4 billion-strong global urban population can in fact be fed sustainably in this way? Asks De Jager.

Making a case for meat producers in Africa, De Jager underscored that the continent with its high stunting incidence, requires diets high in animal-based protein (especially for kids younger than two, as well as pregnant mothers).

### **Soil health**

Calling healthy soil “the new kid on the block” in the food systems debate, De Jager pointed out that nearly 50% of all the challenges relating to the food systems debate have their origin in healthy soil. If each farmer took better care of the soil health on his/her farm, this would adequately address climate change, biodiversity, nature and overall health.

In this vein, he shared that the farming constituency’s value proposition to the food systems summit, in partnership with the World Bank, is to see if the issue of soil health can be addressed by examining:

- Centralisation in value chains regarding plant-based vs animal protein: should the world move towards a plant-based alternative for livestock, for example, there will be increased centralisation of assets, wealth and power in the value chain. This will be a significant impediment in the “decade for family farming” context, and farmers will be impacted negatively.
- A growing focus on nature-based solutions, rather than politics-based solutions: failure to address the impact of the latter in the food systems discourse is to the detriment of farmers. As much as climate change and natural disasters threaten agriculture and food security, so do poor government policies and corruption.

## **LEVERAGING REGIONAL AND CONTINENTAL EFFORTS TO DRIVE EFFORTS AT COUNTRY LEVEL**



Mr Bwalya highlighted that Africa needs a dedicated and deliberate effort to map the way forward – consolidating sustainable, inclusive food systems.

To be effective in its approach to the UNFSS, he said, the African continent should seek to leverage regional and continental efforts into the national action points of each one of the 54 countries.

When it comes to Africa, maximised output is highly dependent on national action. From here, alignment at regional and continental level can culminate in overall success.

Underscoring a need for implementation, Mr Bwalya also urged for inclusive dialogue that prioritises issues that are pertinent to farmers (which will encourage much-needed farmers' participation).

Speaking from one unified voice at the UNFSS, Africa should develop common approaches to managing climate change, the provision of continental African markets, job creation and trade.

## **KEY ISSUES AT STAKE FOR FARMERS**



Mr Jakhar kicked off by debunking the misconception that the UN Food Systems Summit is not listening to farmers. He then extended an open invitation to participants to read the content of the Action Tracks and to get involved in the various dialogues.

The food systems summit is open to suggestions, and willing to learn from participants and relevant chain actors, he said.

### **An increase in food insecurity**

Growing numbers in hunger have necessitated the UNFSS (1 in 9 people are going hungry, and one-third of food is going to waste), highlighted Jakhar. If this trend continues, he cautioned, 10% of the global population will be affected by hunger. This is largely due to the nature of food systems disallowing accessibility and affordability of food for all.

Food systems don't prioritise basic human needs. After 25 years of ratification of the WTO (World Trade Organisation) treaties of food and agricultural trade, 80% of the extremely poor still live in rural areas, yet are tasked to produce the food, continued Jakhar.

### **Unfiltered feedback**

Dialogue participation by all chain actors is critical. Jakhar assured participants that though the current national dialogues are initiated by the United Nations, the solutions and propositions emanating from these dialogues will not be negotiated settlements with the respective governments. They will come directly from stakeholder consultations, he emphasised. In this vein, Jakhar encouraged all chain actors to participate in SACAU's consultations.

### **Consumption behaviour**

He also noted the significant role of consumption behaviour in dictating the outcome of food systems. Farmers don't grow food based on a unilateral decision, he reminded the audience, they're guided by what we consume. "Consumption and government incentives are what determine what farmers grow." Governments can do a lot more, he continued, to repurpose existing subsidies in order to ensure environmental and economic sustainability.

### **Trade**

Better food systems demand improved governance regulation, transparency and accountability.

Farmers deserve to receive the true economic cost of growing food, to enable them to adapt effectively to climate mitigation practices.

Trade needs to become a focus for Africa, as it is in Asian countries. When food is priced below the cost of growing it, it adds to biodiversity loss, climate change and rural poverty. Therefore, Jakhar suggests that export be disallowed from countries that produce food below the true economic cost of growing it. Because this gravely affects the farmers' livelihood.

Since the WTO is a joint effort, it needs to form part of the summit dialogues, especially in relation to food importing countries. The WTO anti-dumping agreement, for example, presents significant impediments for trade. Dumping, explained Jakhar, is when a member country exports a product for less than the price at which it's sold domestically (in the exporting country). This drives down the cost of production. Domestic sale in these exporting countries is then facilitated through government subsidies. Anti-dumping comes in the form of a tariff imposed by governments of importing countries on foreign imports priced below fair market value.

Jakhar concluded his talk by urging SACAU to explore the WTO in the context of trade as a game changing proposition for change.

## **KEY WORKSHOP MESSAGES**

Following the keynote address and the background presentations, farmers' representatives were divided into breakaway groups to deliberate on carefully selected topics, specifically around key UNFSS advocacy and communication messages to be developed.

### **Topic**

Advancing equity, openness and fairness in the governance of value chains and in international trade.

### **Task**

Identify strategic interventions that would be necessary to address this by the producers and other chain actors, as well as the role of research and policy in this regard.

### **Topic**

Enhancing availability and equitable access to factors of production.

### **Task**

Propose critical things that will enhance availability and equitable access to critical production factors for primary producers, understanding that they are not a homogenous category.

### **Topic**

Adoption and scaling out of innovation and technology (including digital technology).

### **Task**

Which research and development/innovations present the greatest opportunities for transforming the lives of farmers, and at scale? Which principles should underpin the governance of data value chains involving farmers' data, and what factors and

investments would enable wider adoptions of innovations within the shortest period of time?

**Topic**

Investing in the next generation of farmers.

**Task**

What strategic interventions are needed to increase the pace and scale of the development of a younger generation of agripreneurs, and what are the commitments of the younger generation of farmers towards this?

**Topic**

Shifting to sustainable and nature-positive production at scale

**Task**

Identify low hanging fruits in achieving significant shifts to nature-positive production by farmers, and at scale; what investments are needed to take farmers on a sustainable and scalable nature-positive production trajectory, and what will theirs and stakeholders' responsibility be in this regard?

**Topic**

Priorities for public and development sector investments.

**Task**

Key areas for public and development sector investments for catalysing transformation of primary production at scale, and game-changing ideas/proposals for the transformation of primary production at scale.

**Topic**

Building more resilient food and agricultural systems.

**Task**

What should the basic values and principles be underpinning future food systems and your contribution towards this? And what are the key priorities for the public and development sectors in funding the transitioning towards this desired state?

In a separate communication, SACAU will share with you a synthesis of the outcomes from the group discussions. These are set to make an invaluable contribution in supplementing the region's collective efforts to prepare adequately for the UNFSS.

The said outcomes form part of SACAU's mandated regional input into the UNFSS engagement processes, as well as general advocacy and communication work.

## SELECTED QUOTES FROM THE WORKSHOP

*The majority of farmers are poverty-stricken despite the food industry being one of the biggest in the world.*

*The onus rests largely on the farmers' constituency to create the food systems they wish for.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic has simply highlighted gaps that were already prevalent in food systems.*

*To advance toward a reformed food system there will need to be compromise from all parties. The time to act and get engaged is now.*

*Dialogue resources are available in all UN languages (and in Portuguese), complemented by a weekly training and orientation programme for those fulfilling critical dialogue roles.*

*The UNFSS endeavours to reflect the interests of all stakeholders in food systems, and in this regard, all conveners of Food Systems Summit Dialogues are strongly encouraged to always include farmers and food producers in dialogues about the future of food systems.*

*A systems approach is what will help the agricultural sector reach the desired scale of change, as well as achieve meaningful recovery. This has become a matter of urgency.*

*As for ensuring health and nutrition on consumers' plates, farmers' responsibility ends with ensuring that the food produced on the farm is the healthiest. The rest is up to the other value chain actors.*

*We mustn't let ourselves be lured into a dispensation with a one-size-fits-all solution to fix all agricultural problems in food systems.*

*If each farmer took better care of the soil health on his/her farm, this would adequately address climate change, biodiversity, nature and overall health.*

*To encourage farmers' participation, dialogue needs to become more inclusive, prioritising issues that are pertinent to farmers.*

*Food systems don't prioritise basic human needs. After 25 years of ratification of the WTO (World Trade Organisation) treaties of food and agricultural trade, 80% of the extremely poor still live in rural areas, yet are tasked to produce the food.*

*As much as climate change and natural disasters threaten agriculture and food security, so do poor government policies and corruption.*



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