

23rd Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written inputs by Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO)

Agenda Item 6: Principles of effective governance for sustainable development - Building inclusive institutions that leave no one behind at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda established an ambitious set of priorities to tackle global challenges and human development. The central tenet of this agenda is “Leaving No One Behind”.

Today, hunger and food insecurity remain far above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and far off track to achieve SDG2. Global hunger, measured by the prevalence of undernourishment (SDG Indicator 2.1.1), remained relatively unchanged, affecting around 9.2 percent of the world population in 2022, compared with 7.9 percent in 2019. It is estimated that about 735 million people faced hunger in 2022, 122 million more people than in 2019. Food insecurity affects women more than men in every region of the world. Meanwhile, more than 3.1 billion people in the world – or 42 percent – were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021. This represents an overall increase of 134 million people compared to 2019 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023).

The drivers of this deterioration are a mix of structural inequalities in access to natural and financial resources and assets, weaknesses in governance and institutional capacities, and the intensification and interaction of conflicts, weather extremes accelerated by climate change and economic slowdowns.

Majority of people affected by food insecurity, poverty and inequality have livelihoods based in agrifood systems. Most of the extreme poor live in rural areas. To bring about a transformational change called by Agenda 2030, we need to reduce hunger, transform our agrifood systems and invest in context-specific governance and institutional arrangements able to support that change, ensuring that no country or no person is left behind (FAO, 2021a).

Social and institutional innovation for sustainable and equitable agrifood systems leaving no one behind

Given the complexity of the global challenges and their interconnectedness, it is crucial to have appropriate institutional mechanisms facilitating multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration at national and territorial levels (UNEP, FAO, UNDP. 2023). These can facilitate finding the right balance between economic, environmental and social objectives, and enabling collective action of a range of public and private actors from relevant sectors.

The principles of inclusiveness, non-discrimination and participation are key; small-scale producers and family farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and foresters; agricultural wage workers, micro enterprises, and migrants are responsible for a large share of food production and are custodians of natural resource and biodiversity. However, they often lack access to assets and natural and financial resources, markets, basic services, and technologies, and capacities to take active part in decision-making processes.

These constraints can be addressed through adaptive and effective regulatory governance, encompassing processes and rules related to security of tenure, capacity development and increased participation in policy and decision-making processes, and adequate institutional mechanisms for contributing to sustained peace and conflict prevention, including humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Advancing digitalization has the potential to enhance the efficiency of agrifood systems, leading to positive impacts on producer livelihoods. Measures include incentives for the creation of digital job opportunities and facilitating access to digital financial services for youth, small-scale producers, and particularly for impoverished and illiterate women. Today, despite a decrease in the overall number of people excluded from the formal financial sector from 2.5 billion in 2011 to 1.7 billion in 2017, women still constitute 56 percent of the globally excluded population (Zimmerman et al., 2020).

Ensuring inclusive and equitable rural transformation

Rural transformation involves a multifaceted process characterized by increased agricultural productivity, improved commercialization, diversified production patterns, and livelihoods. It also encompasses expanded off-farm employment, enhanced entrepreneurial opportunities, improved access to services and infrastructure, and greater influence over relevant policy processes. Effective rural transformation, aligned with the SDGs, mandates the active participation and benefitting of all rural populations, especially small-scale farmers, women, youth, indigenous people, and migrants. Inclusivity and gender equality must be central to the rural transformation process, addressing power imbalances and inequalities to combat exclusion and income disparities (IFAD, 2016).

The above requires tackling exclusionary dynamics at the policy, institutional, and governance levels, including within markets. Distorted trade policies such as export subsidies should be removed and these funds used to help smallholders through direct income support and to encourage them to adopt more sustainable and low carbon production practices.

Through its work on governance, FAO supports countries in strengthening capacities and experience for stronger participation of key stakeholders across the agrifood systems. Approaches such as the Farm Business School (FBS) and Cooperative Business School (CBS) have gained traction for their ease of implementation, wide outreach, and relative self-sustainability. Additionally, field-based participatory education models like the Farmer Field School (FFS) and community-based problem-solving organizations such as the Dimitra Clubs contribute to these transformative efforts.

Strengthening rural institutions and collective action

Despite their substantial contribution to agrifood systems and economies, small-scale food producers earn an average annual income of less than half that of their large-scale counterparts (FAO, 2023a). Disparities extend to land ownership, with fewer than 50 percent of women and men engaged in agricultural production having ownership or secure tenure rights in one-third of assessed countries. Furthermore, men's land ownership is at least twice as prevalent as women's in almost half of the countries. Regarding legal protection of women's rights to land (not limited to agricultural land), nearly 60 percent of analyzed countries have no, very low, or low levels of protection for women's land rights in their laws (FAO, 2023a).

Rural institutions, such as cooperatives and other Producer Organizations (POs) offer essential services that cater to the needs and aspirations of their members, thereby enhancing community well-being. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, these organizations have served as crucial agents of social protection for both their members and communities (FAO, 2023b).

Adequate policy measures and incentives are needed for strengthening rural institutions and their capacities for collective action and participation in decision-making, and empowering them to drive their own development and contribute to the design and execution of policies and programs (FAO, 2023b).

Incentives for sustainable production and consumption, and food safety

Public food procurement can promote sustainable consumption and production, enhance access to healthy diets for consumers of publicly procured food (such as schoolchildren) and generate demand for more sustainable agrifood systems. Public procurement of locally sourced food can also decrease rural poverty by developing markets and providing a reliable source of income for smallholder farmers, while supporting their access to markets, capacities and productivity (FAO et al., 2021).

While food safety is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders, the oversight role of public sector is paramount. It should ensure protection of consumers' health, and fairness among food business operators and inclusiveness, making sure that legislation is not excluding small scale producers, and optimize the use of public resources.

Tackling urbanization's multifaceted impacts on agrifood systems

The escalating demand for food in urban areas coincides with the need for increased production, processing, and distribution within agrifood systems. These changes unfold across the rural–urban continuum and may affect the availability and affordability of healthy diets. Consequently, these effects extend to food security and nutritional outcomes (FAO et al., 2023).

Transformative policies, technologies, and innovations thus necessitate appropriate governance mechanisms. Given the nature of urbanization-related challenges and opportunities across the rural–urban continuum, subnational governments play a crucial role in formulating and implementing comprehensive policies. Operating beyond typical administrative boundaries, these actors can tailor policies to local conditions by capitalizing on advantages and addressing bottlenecks (FAO et al., 2023).

References

FAO et al., 2021. *Public food procurement for sustainable food systems and healthy diets*, volumes 1 and 2, Rome, 2021.

FAO. 2021a. Strategic Framework 2022-2031. Rome, FAO. [Strategic Framework 2022-31 \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/publications/02/04/default.aspx)

FAO. 2021b. Gender-responsive digitalization. A critical component of the COVID-19 response in Africa. Rome, FAO. [Gender-responsive digitalization \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/publications/02/04/default.aspx)

FAO. 2023a. Tracking progress on food and agriculture-related SDG indicators 2023. Rome, FAO. [Tracking progress on food and agriculture-related SDG indicators 2023 \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/publications/02/04/default.aspx)

FAO. 2023b. *Good performance and inclusiveness of poor people in cooperatives and other producer organizations: a possible match? Insights pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic from nine producer organizations around the world*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4917en>

Zimmerman, J.M.; May, M.; Kellison, E.; Klugman, J. 2020. *Digital Cash Transfers in Times of COVID-19 : Opportunities and Considerations for Women's Inclusion and Empowerment (English)*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/378931596643390083/Digital-Cash-Transfers-in-Times-of-COVID-19-Opportunities-and-Considerations-for-Womens-Inclusion-and-Empowerment>

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>

UNEP, FAO and UNDP. 2023. *Rethinking Our Food Systems: A Guide for Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration*. Nairobi, Rome and New York. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6325en>