

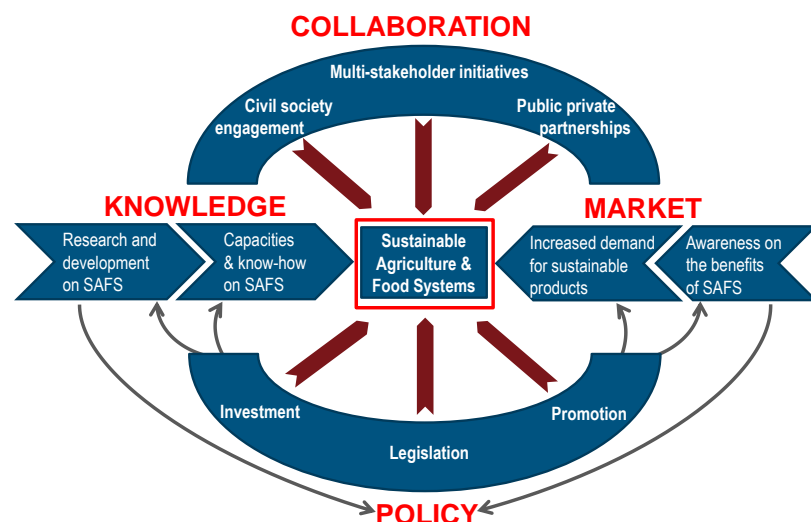
Working towards Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems

Summary of a discussion paper prepared by the Swiss National Committee for the FAO

The main challenge for the agriculture and food sector is to provide nutritious food for the world's population whilst conserving natural resources. Current agriculture and food systems (AFS) contribute significantly to both humanitarian and environmental impacts: A large proportion of the global population faces severe health issues due to malnutrition (deriving from either under-nutrition or over-nutrition) and a majority of those who work in agriculture and food systems struggle for their livelihood. AFS are a major factor influencing soil fertility, water resources, biodiversity and climate change. However, the transformation of AFS provides a powerful lever to address the key challenges of our time.

There is increasingly broad consensus that AFS need to be transformed in a way that they simultaneously provide adequate nutrition for all, minimize negative impact on ecosystems and human health, improve livelihoods and resilience whilst being economically viable. Sustainable AFS thereby can substantially contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as globally agreed in the Agenda 2030.

Obviously there is no single approach or technology solution to make AFS more sustainable. A combination of diverse activities is required that are all well aligned with the agreed objectives. Moving towards sustainable AFS requires a combination of key factors to be aligned: enhanced **knowledge** on more sustainable agricultural practices and value chain designs; awareness among consumers and businesses that increase **market** demand for sustainable products and fair prices; increased **collaboration** among the different stakeholders to advance the agenda; and a **policy** environment that promotes and rewards more sustainable solutions. Building on existing strengths, initiatives and best practices will be key, while at the same time identifying opportunities for improvement and addressing gaps. Progress in moving towards sustainable AFS needs to be regularly assessed with regard to key performance indicators based on an agreed set of objectives.



Based on the proposed objectives and approach, the following key recommendations for policy makers, corporates, farmers and civil society organisations can be formulated:

Enhance knowledge for sustainable AFS

- 1) **Systemic view:** Instead of looking at food system elements or sustainability dimensions in isolation, apply a systemic view that takes into consideration the linkages between (diversified) production, diets, health, education, livelihoods and economic development and the environmental, social, economic and political context.
- 2) **Research and Development:** Governments and private sector actors should leverage their research capacities to intensify research on sustainable AFS design, technology and impact. Research should be participatory (involving farmers and other practitioners), accessible to the public and also include the development of low-cost solutions (e.g. ecological systems, good farming practices).

- 3) **Capacity building:** Vocational training and rural advisory services need to be revised in a way that they enhance comprehensive sustainable AFS knowledge and skills, including entrepreneurial skills. Careers in farming and the agri-food system need to become attractive to young people.
- 4) **Investments:** Investments into the development of sustainable AFS tools, services, funding mechanisms and education need to be enabled and encouraged.

Make markets work for sustainable AFS

- 5) **Food literacy and awareness:** Use various means to raise literacy in food and nutrition and awareness amongst the population, particularly among children and young people.
- 6) **Price stability and fairness:** stabilize producer prices by increasing the negotiation power of producers in the value chain mechanisms, preventing misuse of monopoly power and dependence to single traders.
- 7) **Business case:** Translate the AFS sustainability agenda into economic interests, and vice versa. Sustainable AFS operate in commercial realities and need access to markets and finance.
- 8) **Sustainable sourcing:** Brands, retailers and governments should commit to increasingly source sustainable products (i.e. products that fulfil holistic sustainability requirements or standards).
- 9) **Voluntary Sustainability Standards:** Support the upscaling of VSS, and ensure their credibility and impact.
- 10) **Innovative marketing mechanisms:** Support systems that bring producers and consumers closer together, strengthen trust and mutual understanding.

Enhance collaboration for sustainable AFS

- 11) **Overcome polarization:** Recognize that there is no single approach to address these complex challenges and that the combination of best practices from different systems is needed.
- 12) **Dialogue:** Facilitate direct dialogue and exchange between stakeholders to increase mutual understanding of issues and required action.
- 13) **Joint efforts:** Farmers, private sector, academia, civil society and governments need to 'join hands' to address specific issues and to upscale best practices.
- 14) **Participation:** Ensure that all relevant stakeholders and value chain actors are involved in these efforts and are able to contribute in a meaningful way. This requires enhancing political literacy and resources of weaker stakeholder groups so that they can participate.
- 15) **Transparency:** Enhance transparency and traceability in food systems and value chains with regard to their sustainability performance in order to allow buyers and consumers to make informed choices.

Create a conducive policy context

- 16) **Opportunities:** Offer programs and incentives to make farming and the agri-food system attractive, particularly to young people.
- 17) **Governance:** Facilitate multi-stakeholder governance structures ensuring that all have a say (including smallholders); foster integrated, cross-sectorial, cross-ministerial planning for a truly systemic view of AFS
- 18) **Policy coherence:** Identify and revise existing policies and legislation that provide incentives for non-sustainable AFS, and reframe them in a way that they encourage more sustainable solutions.
- 19) **True cost/value:** Assess the true cost of different AFS and introduce mechanisms that internalize external costs and enhance positive externalities.
- 20) **Accountability of actors:** Ensure that all actors of AFS are transparent and accountable concerning their sustainability impacts (positive and negative ones).

The full version of the discussion paper is available at
<https://www.blw.admin.ch/blw/fr/home/international/institutionen/cns-fao.html>