



**UNITED NATIONS
FOOD SYSTEMS
SUMMIT 2021**

Action Track Discussion Starter

Action Track 2 – Shift to healthy and sustainable consumption patterns

1. The problem to be tackled: Food has become a primary source of poor health and environmental degradation around the world, with glaring disparities between rich and poor

Every year poor dietary health accounts for 11 million premature deaths globally.ⁱ While hunger and undernutrition persist, diet-related health conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer are rising. Increasingly communities face a double burden of malnutrition, where both undernutrition and overweight/obesity are prevalent. One reason for this is that, in recent decades, food systems have tended to provide more quantity but less quality food. Greater availability of cheap calories has not translated into better availability of nutritious foods.ⁱⁱ Current food policies, food industry practices and shifting consumer preferences are driving overconsumption and dramatic growth in consumption of highly-processed foods and beverages.^{iii,iv,v,vi} These products are often high in calories, unhealthy fats, sugars and/or artificial sweeteners, additives and sodium, while being low in fibre, vitamins and minerals. In addition, many diets have an increasing share of animal-sourced ingredients and foods are often served in supersized portions.

In higher income countries, cheaper food has led to greater food waste, while today's long and complex food value chains, coupled with intensive animal production, can increase the risk of fast transmission of food-borne diseases and the spill over of zoonotic agents (including viruses), as well as other food-related health risks such as anti-microbial resistance.

Last but not least, food consumption is the single largest driver of multiple environmental pressures, accounting for 80% of land conversion and biodiversity loss, 80% of contamination of freshwater and coastal ecosystems, 80% of freshwater consumption and contributing 20-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The hidden costs to society of these health and environmental impacts of the global food system are heavy, at an estimated US\$12 trillion every year which is US\$2 trillion above its estimated annual net value generation.^{vii} What foods we consume, how much we consume, and how much we lose and waste have, thus, become critical options for people and planet.

2. What we want to achieve: Propositions for game-changing solutions to drive the transition towards healthy and sustainable consumption^{viii} in a culturally appropriate manner

Guided by the best available scientific evidence, best practice and real world examples, Action Track 2 aims to generate game-changing propositions that can catalyse shifts in food



environments, private sector actions and offerings and consumer behaviour, towards diets around the world which are more environmentally¹, economically and socially sustainable. Key outcomes to which the proposed solutions should contribute include:

- A dramatic increase in the availability and affordability of safe, healthy foods globally, especially wholegrains, legumes and nuts, and fresh vegetables and fruits, and alternative protein sources, and particularly for vulnerable and poor population groups, sufficient quantities of healthy protein sources, including sustainably-produced dairy, eggs, seafood and meat;
- At the global level, and particularly with respect to more affluent populations, bending down the rising curve in consumption of animal-sourced foods, especially red meat;
- Reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and processed foods high in calories, unhealthy fats, sugars and artificial sweeteners, sodium and additives;
- Halving per capita food waste at retail and consumer levels by 2030 (SDG target 12.3) and transitioning to a circular food economy where waste becomes a thing of the past; and
- Strengthening the connections between consumers and producers of food, including by fostering development of more robust local value chains wherever feasible

Achieving these outcomes would unleash enormous social, economic and environmental progress, and help achieve the SDGs, the Paris Climate Accord and other internationally-agreed commitments.

Vision: By the time of the UN Food Systems Summit in autumn 2021 significant momentum is underway to shift to healthy and sustainable food consumption:

- An exciting menu of game changing solutions for shifting food consumption to healthy and sustainable patterns is on the table.
- A critical mass of government, private sector, public sector and other actors are ready to announce significant commitments to take action in line with such solutions.
- A global movement of people are making changes in their daily food choices and are demanding action by governments and business to enable and accelerate healthy and sustainable food consumption, by making it affordable, accessible and desirable

3. Defining and mapping the key solution arenas

All actors in society — including local and national policymakers, private sector actors within the food system and beyond (e.g., finance and technology), consumers and citizens — have a role to play in the shift towards healthier, safe and sustainable consumption. Equity and social justice must be central to the transition, to provide the greatest benefit to all. Indicative areas for action to consider include:

A. Empower consumers to make informed, healthy, safe and sustainable choices.

This could include: investing in education about what constitutes a healthy, safe and

¹ Key environmental dimensions of importance include greenhouse gas emissions, cropland use, water use, Nitrogen and Phosphorus use, and biodiversity.



sustainable diet and the links between food consumption, environment and health; regulating food marketing; improving food-related sustainability and nutrition standards (including for improved nutrition labelling); integrating environmental sustainability into dietary guidelines; and increasing awareness, information and transparency across the food value chains to foster consumer trust and confidence in the food supply, including through digital means.

- B. Improve availability and access to healthy, safe and sustainable food and beverages.** This could include: integrated food policy and regulatory reforms to improve food environments; reforming public procurement policies; applying behavioral insights to nudge consumers as well as other food system actors to make the right choice the easiest choice (including food reformulation); mobilizing significant private/public investment to increase production, access and affordability of healthy and sustainably produced foods; invest in improving food-related infrastructure and logistics systems, and shortening of supply chains; developing partnerships to minimize food waste in the food service, retail and home environments; and measuring and regulating consumer and retail food waste.

Incentivizing markets and corporations to provide healthy foods

There are a variety of different mechanisms to encourage corporations and markets — using both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ approaches — to reorient their activities and transition to providing healthy foods. Business-driven mechanisms include, for example, developing pre-competitive cooperation to drive consumer behavioral change, and translating years of marketing experience to encourage consumers to purchase healthy and sustainable foods. Government-driven mechanisms include fiscal measures (taxes/subsidies), regulatory measures, trade rules, investment in consumer education, product labelling requirements, and building food safety nets. Investor-driven mechanisms can include shareholder divestment to avoid harm and social impact investing. Civil-society driven mechanisms mobilize people as consumers and voters to demand healthy, sustainable products, rejecting unhealthy products and demanding increased accountability from food system actors.

- C. Enabling interventions.** These could include:
- Off-setting the economic and structural costs associated with transition (e.g. supporting food system actors affected by change; redirecting funding; facilitating access to loans).
 - Capitalizing on the growing movement to improve urban food environments.
 - Investing in women’s empowerment, leadership and technical and managerial skills.
 - Prioritizing the support, protection and promotion of breastfeeding.
 - Mobilizing youth, farmers, social influencers and the health, education, faith-based and culinary communities as critical agents of change.
 - Piloting and scaling up behaviour change interventions that are effective in reducing consumer food waste and increasing adoption of healthy and sustainable diets.
 - Use full supply chain traceability to promote social justice in the food industry and protect people employed in food systems everywhere.



Solutions will need to be tailored to local contexts, including cultural and socio-economic aspects, the specific political economy of food, how the food systems function, existence and level of implementation of policies and regulations, institutional capacities and the constraints on consumers' capacity to change what they eat. Nonetheless, any country or local jurisdiction can build an agenda for change using the broad action framework outlined above.

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UN Anchor Organization: *World Health Organization (WHO)*

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