

Feature

The Food Systems Dialogues through the lenses of Switzerland's experiences

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Food. It fuels our bodies and sustains our minds. It also brings us closer to our beloved ones and our culture, while connecting us to every corner of the world.

At the same time, the way we produce, process, distribute, and consume food also has negative impacts on millions of vulnerable people and our environment. With Food Systems touching on so many different, and yet interconnected, aspects they are at the interface with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) that we, as a global community, have set out to achieve by 2030. As such, food systems offer an entry point to transformative actions.

In this context, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres will convene the Food Systems Summit in September 2021, which will pave the way for the Decade of Action to reach the 17 SDGs by 2030. This year's Summit is focused on people – “[a summit for everyone everywhere](#)” – a framing that opens up opportunities (see e.g. this [Biovision interview](#)).

The process leading to the summit has adopted the [Food Systems Dialogues](#) (FSDs) as the main method to foster meaningful discussions, where the silent masses are invited to participate in shaping strategies to transform food systems. These dialogues follow a structured approach and a standardised procedure to facilitate gathering and reporting knowledge generated during FSD events in preparation to the Summit.

Switzerland and FSDs

As announced in the [December newsletter edition](#), the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** will organise a series of [independent Food Systems Dialogues](#) between April and June 2021, in English, French and Spanish**.

With its involvement in a broad range of activities in food systems in developing and transition countries, as well as emerging economies, the SDC is in a unique position to mobilise diverse and relevant food system actors to engage in a multi-stakeholder dialogue around transdisciplinary topics. These dialogues are expected to contribute to a common understanding on the priorities in the transformation of food systems to achieve the SDG Agenda 2030 among staff within SDC and partner organisations across sectors. They will also contribute to the planning and implementation of the interventions of the SDC and its partners, in addition to feeding into the UN Food Systems Summit through our reports and that of the Swiss delegates to the summit.

THE 3 TYPES OF FOOD SYSTEM DIALOGUES

GLOBAL SUMMIT DIALOGUES

WHO?

Co-convened by the Food Systems Summit Special Envoy, Dr. Agnes Kalibata

WHY?

To bring political attention to food systems in high-level thematic and sectoral meetings and processes

WHEN?

Alongside key global events on climate, biodiversity, environment, nutrition, the ocean, economies, and related issues within the 2030 Agenda that have connections to food systems

MEMBER STATE DIALOGUES

WHO?

Convened by national authorities, with participants from all stakeholder groups. In partner countries, the UN Resident Coordinators act as focal point in view of supporting the implementation of Member State Dialogues

WHY?

To support Member States in developing national pathways towards sustainable food systems with focus on the SDGs and 5 Action Tracks to transform Food Systems

WHEN?

In three stages between November 2020 and June 2021

INDEPENDENT DIALOGUES

WHO?

Convened by individuals or organizations independently of national authorities but with the opportunity to formally connect into the Summit process through an official feedback mechanism

WHY?

To offer opportunities for all citizens to engage directly in proposing pathways towards sustainable food systems, exploring new ways of working together and encouraging collaborative action

WHEN?

Official feedbacks have to be submitted before the summer

Switzerland, led by the **Federal Office of Agriculture (FOAG)**, has already organised different types of FSDs, with more yet to come.

In January 2020, the FOAG organised a [High-Level Dialogue](#) as a side-event to the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, which focused on “Investing in Food Systems Transformation” ([summary report](#)) with food systems experts. More recently, it held an **independent dialogue** in the context of the 9th Swiss Green Economy Symposium ([report](#)). The discussions focused on investments and infrastructure, production and supply chains, health for people and the planet, collaboration, innovation and digitalization. The dialogue took a broader overview of what the current issues in building sustainable food systems in Switzerland are. Finally, in December 2020, FOAG co-organised the first **global summit dialogue**, in collaboration with Costa Rica, the World Wide Fund (WWF) and curated by David Nabarro. This dialogue was held during the [3rd global conference of the Sustainable Food System \(SFS\) Programme](#). With a discussion around 9 topics, it explored the roles key stakeholders can play in making food systems sustainable, and conducted an overview of some of the major challenges we face to make these systems sustainable and equitable ([full report](#)).

These events provided hands-on experience and insights to organise the **upcoming National FSDs**. The latter were developed to both feed into the UN [Action Tracks](#) towards Sustainable Food Systems and support the development of the Swiss Sustainable Development strategy. To this end, participants will discuss 8 topics: Sustainable Food Environment, Food demand & Sustainable Diets, Sustainable Production, Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Resilience & Food Security, Food Waste & Loss, Socio-economic dimensions of the Agricultural Sector, and Entrepreneurship, Science & Technologies.

In an interview, Alwin Kopse (FOAG) told us more about their experiences in organising these events. He also shared some lessons learned along the way, discussing why these dialogues matter.



[Watch the full interview](#)

Have you attended – or intend to – National or Independent food systems dialogues? Are you organising or planning to organise such events? Do you think FSDs can bring upon change?

[Share your opinions and experiences with us!](#)

** We have prolonged the application deadline for the SDC Independent Food Systems Dialogues to **April 13th**. We are looking especially for eloquent participants representing more vulnerable stakeholder groups in food systems. Please reach out to them by calling them, explaining the purpose of the dialogue and the importance of their participation and stake in shaping the future of food systems.

Useful resources:

The [Food Systems Dialogue Gateway](#) provides all the relevant information about FSDs, including an overview of the [Dialogue events](#) around the globe and other key resources.

This [publication from UN One Planet](#) network’s Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Programme provides an in-depth overview of the **key approaches, concepts, and terms related to sustainable food systems** among a broad range of relevant stakeholders to facilitate knowledge and common understanding ([abstract](#)).