

Event Report: Improving Diets and Nutrition through Food Systems: What Will It Take?

Dialogue on IFPRI's 2024 Global Food Policy Report

The Hybrid European launch of IFPRI's 2024 Global Food Policy Report took place at a pivotal moment, with growing global attention on food systems, nutrition and the urgent need for transformative change.

Amanda Harding, moderator and leading Convene, opened the event welcoming the 70+ participants present at the venue as well as the over 1.000 participants joining online. Amanda was joined on stage by Ivo Demmers, Executive Director of the Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) and representing the Dutch partners supporting the NL-CGIAR Strategic Partnership. Demmers emphasized the “poly-crisis” of climate change, food insecurity, and biodiversity loss, calling for cross-sector collaboration with food systems as a crucial entry point. He also introduced Marcel Beukeboom, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN in Rome, as a key listener to the event who would share his final reflections at the closing of the event. Beukeboom shared that he would be particularly listening to the “how” and the “with whom”.



Advancing the Global Nutrition Agenda

With major global events on the horizon, including COP29, the Nutrition for Growth Summit, and the SUN Global Gathering, IFPRI's report offers guidance for future policy and driving effective actions to

improve diets worldwide, to reshape the future for both human and planetary well-being. A panel of experts reflected on the significance of such reports, emphasizing how evidence-based approaches are vital for advancing the global nutrition agenda, aligning multi-sector initiatives, and addressing the urgent need for sustainable dietary improvements across regions and communities.

Afshan Khan, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, emphasized that translating research into action requires clear, actionable evidence and strong collaborations across sectors. She pointed to initiatives like the SUN Business Network that help micro, small and medium enterprises to make shifts around the availability and fortification of quality, nutritious foods. Daniel Westerink, Deputy Ambassador, Embassy of France in the Netherlands, underscored the importance of the Nutrition for Growth Summit in bringing together multiple sectors - climate, gender, nutrition - and pointed to the crucial role that knowledge holders can play in translating knowledge into action, even despite the challenging operating environment. Lawrence Haddad, Executive Director, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), brought in a nuanced



perspective on the role of evidence, arguing that while evidence is crucial for making a positive impact and its absence can hinder progress, it is not a cure-all for solving all problems. He also explored the complexities of operationalizing evidence across diverse regions, urging for context-specific, practical research that leads to tangible solutions, such as AI-assisted assessments of food procurement policies. The panel consensus was clear: evidence, policy, and cross-sector collaboration are key to catalyze the necessary change.

Key Insights from IFPRI's Global Food Policy Report

Jo Swinnen, Director General, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Managing Director, Systems Transformation Science Group, CGIAR, outlined the report's four central themes: availability, accessibility, affordability, and desirability of healthy foods. These interconnected areas, he noted, are foundational to achieving global dietary improvements. Swinnen highlighted that reliable food production, trade policies that reduce the high costs of healthy diets, and shifting consumer

behaviors toward healthier choices are all vital to meeting global nutrition goals. He reinforced the idea that such progress requires not just research but collaborative implementation, with no single entity able to address the challenges in isolation. Swinnen's introduction served as a foundation for a series of short presentations, each addressing specific chapters in the report and offering actionable insights.



Chapter 2, presented by Deanna Olney (Director of the Nutrition, Diets, and Health (NDH) Unit and lead of the CGIAR Research Initiative 'FRESH'), addressed the growing dual burdens of undernutrition and obesity. Olney advocated for a food systems approach that centers sustainable healthy diets and manages tradeoffs between dietary outcomes and sustainability concerns and connects with other systems like social protection, health and education to achieve nutrition impact. As an example of potential solutions to address micronutrient gaps, she highlighted measures like food fortification, biofortification and targeted micronutrient supplements. Kalle Hirvonen (Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI's Poverty, Gender, and Inclusion Unit), presenting Chapter 4, highlighted the pressing issue of food affordability, noting that 2-3 billion people, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, struggle to afford healthy diets. Overcoming this challenge requires tackling poverty, food prices, and consumer preferences through economic policies, social protection, and targeted interventions. Jef Leroy (Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI's NDH Unit) in his presentation of Chapter 5, examined the changing food environment, particularly the influence of digital platforms and advertising, especially on youth. He called for policies such as front-of-pack labeling, taxes on unhealthy foods, and restrictions on advertising to shift the food environment toward healthier choices. Finally, Danielle

Resnick (Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI's Development Strategies and Governance Unit) spoke on the role of governance in improving nutrition, emphasizing the need for coordinated, adaptive approaches that account for trade-offs across sectors, and the growing agency of civil society in shaping food policies.

Policy Pathways for Transforming Food Systems



During this conversation key policy experts explored the science-policy interface, international cooperation and the challenge of addressing the lock-ins that prevent significant progress. Guido Landheer, Deputy Director-General for Agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature in the Netherlands, highlighted the importance of creating common frameworks and agenda setting through cooperation spaces where science, government, private sector and society come together. Steven Collet, Deputy Director General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, discussed the role of international cooperation in low and middle-income countries, where science-driven, demand-led policies must be prioritized to address issues such as price volatility and promote fairer food prices. In this process private sector engagement is crucial, given its

significant involvement and power across the food system. Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, Sustainable Agri-Food systems and Fisheries, European Commission, stressed the challenges of intersectorality in policy design, highlighting the need for multisectoral approaches, including gender-sensitive and youth-inclusive strategies, especially in the context of food systems. Senalor K. Yawlui, Deputy Ambassador of Ghana to the Netherlands, emphasized the importance of multi-actor, multi-sector and multi-scale approaches to global food security, advocating for the important role of the private sector to finding solutions fit to the context, as well as calling for policy predictability and long-term planning to build resilient food systems, particularly in developing countries. The panelists agreed that tackling global food security challenges requires coordinated efforts across sectors and scales.

Entry Points and Catalysts for Accelerating Action

The dialogue, in which both in-person and online participants contributed, centered on identifying key entry points and catalysts for accelerating progress toward sustainable, healthy diets. Contributions

highlighted the importance of policy work at the local level to connect city governments with smallholder farmers and markets. They stressed that investments should focus on strengthening local institutions and networks to bridge the gap between science and policy effectively. The discussion also underscored integrating nutrition into financial frameworks, such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), to drive improvements in nutrition and sustainability. Participants advocated for stronger links between agriculture and nutrition, empowering smallholder farmers, and enhancing nutrient cycles in agriculture for sustainable food systems.



Highlights of the closing remarks

In the closing remarks, Jo Swinnen, Director General of IFPRI, reinforced the need to address the interconnected challenges of food availability, affordability, accessibility, and desirability. He emphasized that school feeding programs, such as afternoon meals, could be an effective solution to make meals more nutritious. Swinnen also discussed the geopolitical challenges impacting food systems and stressed the need for navigating these complexities effectively, especially in light of global polarization. He noted that financing is essential for transformation and pointed to upcoming efforts, such as an upcoming blog series, that will explore the role of finance in food systems.

Marcel Beukeboom, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN in Rome, emphasized the importance of making food system discussions accessible to broader audiences. He stressed the need for effective communication between science and policy, with a focus on

incorporating farmers' perspectives into policymaking. Beukeboom also reflected on the global inequalities within food systems, noting the disparities between wealthy and developing nations, and between urban and rural areas. He called for an equitable approach, highlighting the role of government regulation in promoting healthier diets and advocated for a new definition of PPP's that focus on People, Price, and Preference.

Ivo Demmers, Executive Director of the Netherlands Food Partnership, concluded by stressing the importance of bringing food system issues to wider societal audiences. He highlighted the need for "stubborn optimism", a term shared by Amanda Harding during the event, as critical for pushing forward collective efforts.

About the event

This event, hosted in Museon-Omniversum in The Hague, The Netherlands, was co-organized by IFPRI, the Netherlands Food Partnership, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security, and Nature. It was supported by the Director General for International Partnerships – Sustainable Agri-Food systems and fisheries from the European Commission and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, represented by the Special Envoy for Nutrition and Secretary General of Nutrition for Growth Paris.