

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Thursday, 15 July 2021
DIALOGUE TITLE	The role of evaluation in moving towards zero hunger and sustainable food systems: challenges and solutions
CONVENED BY	EvalForward Community of Practice on Evaluation for Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/30489/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	No borders

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

102

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-18	12	19-30	58	31-50	29	51-65	3	66-80		80+
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PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

37	Male	61	Female	4	Prefer not to say or Other
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

31	Agriculture/crops	5	Education	2	Health care
	Fish and aquaculture	5	Communication	2	Nutrition
	Livestock		Food processing	4	National or local government
2	Agro-forestry	1	Food retail, markets		Utilities
8	Environment and ecology		Food industry		Industrial
1	Trade and commerce		Financial Services	39	Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

2	Small/medium enterprise/artisan		Workers and trade union
	Large national business		Member of Parliament
1	Multi-national corporation		Local authority
2	Small-scale farmer	9	Government and national institution
	Medium-scale farmer	1	Regional economic community
	Large-scale farmer		United Nations
6	Local Non-Governmental Organization	1	International financial institution
25	International Non-Governmental Organization		Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance
	Indigenous People		Consumer group
5	Science and academia	25	Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Dialogue aimed to convene between 80- 100 participants from different networks and stakeholder groups with a broad interest in evaluation and in M&E and spanning across different professional affiliations and sectors. The main network that the Dialogue drew from is the EvalForward Community of Practice, which counts over 1,000 members and focuses on evaluation for agriculture, food security and rural development. We circulated the invitation also on social media and within other professional and advocacy networks as well as in the evaluation offices of the Rome-based agencies. We sent all registered participants the principles of engagement in advance of the Dialogue and invited them to read them along with the topics and questions for the discussion groups, in order for them to prepare to actively participate in the discussion and make recommendations to the Food Systems Summit.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Following the welcome and opening remarks by Andrea Cook, director of evaluation in WFP and curator of the Dialogue, the complexity of food systems and the need to act with urgency were laid out from different perspectives by the panelists. The speakers prepared the ground for the following group discussions: i) Philippe Ellul from the UN Food Systems Summit secretariat provided an overview on the food systems summit rationale and expected outcomes; ii) Michael Quinn Patton, Founder and Director of Utilization-Focused Evaluation presented the challenges and opportunities for evaluation to address the complexities of the food systems transformation and the need to act with urgency to respond to global emergencies such as climate change and the degradation of the world's natural resources; iii) Marie Gaarder, executive director of 3ie, presented the wealth of evidence available on topics related to food systems and the knowledge gaps in certain areas. She called for accelerating efforts to put together and complement evidence, avoiding duplication, and encouraged innovative approaches to understand the impacts of systems-level transformation such as evidence gap mapping. After the panel, participants were divided into four parallel breakout rooms to discuss selected topics, with a facilitator and a note taker in each breakout room to ensure everyone had an opportunity to be heard and voiced opinions were captured. Points of divergence were heard and noted in an open and productive manner. Each discussion group explored a specific topic related to the role of evaluation in supporting sustainable food systems and food systems transformation, with related statements and questions to guide participants' inputs. The aim for each group was to come up with 3 to 5 key messages to report in plenary and feed into the Evaluation for Food Systems Statement (see main findings section below).

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

No

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

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Yes

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No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

Evaluation is cross-cutting to the Summit and to the Action Tracks, and this FSS Independent Dialogue had a twofold aim and focus:

1. Bring to the fore of the Summit the contribution of evaluation to learning and accountability for sustainable food systems and for the FSS commitments & follow up.
2. Engage evaluation stakeholders in reflecting on how evaluation needs to change and evolve.

Participants exchanged on the below four topics, each one presented with an accompanying statement and related questions to guide inputs:

1. The role of evaluation for Sustainable Food Systems

- Examples of evaluations making a difference, resulting in strengthened sustainable food systems?
- Lessons from the impact of COVID-19 crises on food systems?

2. Evaluation methods and approaches for food systems transformation

Evaluation needs to change in order to understand and help address food systems and their transformation from the local to the global scale. It needs to move away from project / programme approaches and apply systems thinking.

- What are the most useful approaches and tools to include a food systems perspective in evaluations to address this change?
- What approaches and methods are best suited for evaluating agriculture research or innovation, to enhance ensuring uptake of research that improves Food Systems?

3. Evaluation practice: what do we need to change or improve?

Evaluators are traditionally called to evaluate at the end of projects/programmes. However, in order to evaluate and inform change of complex and interconnected processes, evaluators should be part of all stages of interventions and engage in an iterative dialogue and co-creative process of change.

- How do you see this happening?
- How would evaluators adopt an adaptive, developmental approach?

4. Evidence towards the UN Food Systems Summit objectives

- Should we evaluate the Summit itself, and the degree to which it achieved its objectives? If yes, how?
- What long-term monitoring and/or evaluation framework would be required for food systems reform? What can we learn or build upon from the SDGs/Agenda2030 process?

ACTION TRACKS

✓	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
✓	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
✓	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
✓	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
✓	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

	Finance		Policy
	Innovation	✓	Data & Evidence
	Human rights		Governance
	Women & Youth Empowerment		Trade-offs
			Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

The aim for each group was to come up with 3 to 5 key messages to report in plenary. We have put together these messages to develop the below Evaluation for Food Systems Statement of main messages, which reflects and summarizes Dialogue participants inputs and vision on the role of evaluation for food systems.

EVALUATION FOR FOOD SYSTEMS STATEMENT OF MAIN MESSAGES

- Participants in this independent dialogue agreed that evaluation and evidence should be at the hearth of the Food Systems Summit, and support the role of evaluation in providing evidence and lessons to inform food systems transformation and in reviewing the summit outcomes and commitments.
- New approaches and innovations are required to transform food systems, for a more equitable and sustainable world. Evaluation has a key role to play in supporting this, by shedding light on the complexities and interdependencies of food systems and identifying actionable and timely solutions, and ultimately contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Participants in the FSS Independent Dialogue highlighted that evaluation and the evaluation community can:
 - o Deliver evidence to inform decision making towards sustainable and resilient food systems,
 - o Offer results on what works and what doesn't, responding to the need to act with urgency to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,
 - o Draw on and put into context lessons learned, including those on the impacts of Covid-19 on food systems and the failures uncovered by this crises,
 - o Engage in assessing the outcomes of the Summit and how the Summit narrative informs actions, especially at the national and regional levels.
- Participants also discussed how, in order to unleash the full potential of evaluation, evaluators need to evolve as a community and to take on board new professional and methodological challenges. These relate to ways of working, methods and approaches and to the practice of evaluation within the broader development ecosystem. The following points were raised and considered necessary for evaluation and the evaluation community to support transformation of food systems:
 - o Promote an evaluation culture, in order to enhance the learning value of evaluation, in balance with accountability objectives, and for evaluation to become everyone's business, including donors, commissioners, decision-makers, civil society and others involved in food systems.
 - o Embrace the complexity of food systems transformation and other global challenges – such as climate change and its impact, which require integrating systems thinking and dealing with uncertainties.
 - o Promote the role of evaluators as engaged participants: evaluators should position themselves in a more dialogic and partnership role in order to facilitate support decision-making, and engage in open communication to help form solutions and stimulate transformative change.
 - o Innovate methods and approaches making a case for non-traditional and creative ones. These may include developmental, participatory and other approaches, which are more suited to help understand the complexity around food systems, while ensuring that the focus on quality is preserved.
 - o Continue to develop capacities of evaluators so that they are equipped with the necessary skills and confidence in making the right choices on methods and approaches.
 - o Ensure more inclusive and equitable evaluations: cross fertilize research and evaluation with local and indigenous food systems and practices and involve different stakeholders in the process- leave no one behind

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/4

Discussion group 1: The role of evaluation for Sustainable Food Systems

In this group participants discussed the role that evaluation can play in strengthening food systems and the lessons that should be taken on board from the impacts of the Covid on food systems, in order to support progress towards more sustainable and resilient food systems.

Participants agreed that evaluation is able to deliver the knowledge and evidence needed to inform decision-making leading to transformation of food systems. For this to happen and for the evaluation community to fully release its potential, the field of evaluation needs to keep up to and evolve as much as are the development challenges we are confronted to, which are becoming increasingly complex and urgent. Evaluation tools and frameworks have to be adapted to address and to analyze the complexity of the food systems and make a difference. This is already happening and participants shared two examples moving in this direction: i) The CGIAR is developing its new research programme cycle, in which they revised methods used, approaches, areas to analyze, among others. This revision led to enhancing the way in which evaluations should be carried out, and what they should prioritize. ii) The Nourish for flourish diagnostic evaluation/needs assessment, provides an example of a diagnostic evaluation to determine food security needs, carried out at the provincial level in Cape Town in partnership with Academia and other stakeholders, leading to a multilevel stakeholder discussion, which enhanced the engagement among stakeholders towards food systems key areas of improvement. Outcomes were taken by the provincial government to develop a strategy for improving food systems. This exercise, which can be seen as a process use evaluation, helped create community and government led groups to discuss and address food security issues.

The Covid crisis has shown that gaps in income and food insecurity are increasing. The coping mechanisms that people are putting in place can be leveraged as opportunities to innovate food systems interventions. The group also noted that resilience is a key aspect to support as it translates into improved preparedness during crisis.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/4

Discussion group 2: Evaluation methods and approaches for food systems transformation

This was quite a rich discussion with a variety of suggestions and inputs made both on the methods and approached that evaluation should adopt to address food systems transformation.

Participants emphasized that to address complexity it is important to use participatory approaches and the engagement of stakeholders, particularly small-scale farmers. For instance, the qualitative impact protocol (QUIP) puts the farmers at the center of the system, helps to understand the contribution of other actors and linkages. Inclusive and equitable evaluations were also suggested to address root-causes of inequalities: indigenous evaluations and feminist approaches in particular. Realist evaluation type approaches are important to contextualize findings. These do not exclude other approaches such as theory of change evaluation and impact evaluation. The best team would consist of a team that understands the principles behind each of these and use them for usual reinforcement.

Other evaluation approaches suggested were Contribution analysis, Outcome Harvesting.

"Outcome mapping and outcome harvesting help us to better understand unintended consequences and are quite useful in supplementing some of our traditional approaches" added a participant

Regarding specific tools and methods that evaluators can use to address the complexities of food systems and their transformation, Theories of Change were mentioned, and in particular new nested approaches to Theories of Change design, which are important for bringing stakeholders together.

In the toolbox of evaluators, there should also be a place for Stakeholder mapping, and in order to deepen and expand on specific stakeholders input and influence, influence mapping in decision-making.

For policy evaluations, and considering that food systems cuts across different ministries/ authorities, observations and immersion, that consists of immerse evaluators in the policy making process to understand the people embedded in the systems. Last but not least, smart technologies and data tools are useful assets in evaluations of food systems, which can be constrained by capacities of evaluators themselves.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/4

Discussion group 3: Evaluation practice: what do we need to change or improve?

This group focused on the evaluation practice and what we need to change, improve, adapt acknowledging complexity and uncertainty and what are the challenges and what does it mean to adopt an adaptive and developmental evaluation approach. First participants acknowledged that organizations have different organizational cultures and degrees to which they appreciate and support evaluation as a function or as a culture and therefore how much they focus on accountability or understand it as a learning opportunity to use broadly across the organization. It is important to advocate for strengthening the evaluation culture and to balance accountability and learning, aiming for evaluation to become everyone's business. Evaluators come from different educational and professional backgrounds, and addressing systems, complexity, and uncertainty may require a mindset shift, as we are not evaluating a linear process. Linked to this is the choice of appropriate methods, making a case for non-traditional and creative approaches to be encouraged: this may be difficult sometimes for evaluators to select and promote, though we need to move away from the notion of a gold standard to appreciating participatory, developmental, adaptive approaches.

"in complex systems, it's really difficult to be an independent evaluator with a fixed set of questions and say this is right and this is wrong – participatory approaches need to be embedded in the evaluation" – said a participant

The context for applying "new" methods does not always exist and we need to have key elements on leadership, resources, donors' flexibility and organizational culture as mentioned earlier.

In addition, while applying new tools and methods more suitable to addressing systems transformation and complexities, it will be important not to lose track of quality.

All of this calls for having capacity development for all actors to understand and for evaluators to be confident in proposing methods and approaches

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/4

Discussion group 4: Evidence towards the UN Food Systems Summit objectives

This group agreed on the need to evaluate the outcomes of the Food Systems Summit and discussed how the summit and its outcomes could be evaluated. Evaluating a summit may have potentially many unintended and complex effects. To evaluate the usefulness of the Summit we need to assess: i) the diversity in type of producers and consumers represented: e.g. small holders need to have voice and influence in this summit: degree to which the summit was open to different voices including smallholders; ii) how much did the Summit influence the narrative, the conceptual focus, but also the actions : did the summit have a ripple effect in media, public opinion etc.. It was also added that the language deployed in the FSS would be one indicator of change taking place thanks to the summit; iii) include the regional level in GLOCAL language and action: The regional level is ideal for knowledge aggregation and dissemination adaptation of global ideas to the local level and to learn from local level. System-wide reviews of progress towards the 2030 Agenda could be done regionally. "The FSS should have institutional arrangements to monitor and evaluate what it achieves," added a participant.

ACTION TRACKS

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

ACTION TRACKS

- ☒ Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
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KEYWORDS

- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Innovation
- ☐ Human rights
- ☐ Women & Youth Empowerment
- ☐ Policy
- ☒ Data & Evidence
- ☐ Governance
- ☐ Trade-offs
- ☐ Environment and Climate

ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

RELEVANT LINKS

- **dialogue webpage with recordings and presentations**
<https://www.evalforward.org/webinars/fss-independent-dialogue>