Food Systems for the 21st century: How data-driven analysis, and multi-stakeholder collaboration contribute to policy decision-making and investments.

On 24 October 2023, at the 51st Plenary Session of the Committee on World Food Security, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the European Union, the Swedish Government and the Swedish International Agriculture Network Initiative, (SIANI), organised a side event to discuss how data-driven analysis, and multi-stakeholder collaboration can contribute to food systems' policy decision-making and investments.

Opening the session, Mr Dan Ericsson, State Secretary to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Chair of the Swedish FAO Committee, acknowledged the CFS endorsement of the Policy Recommendations on Strengthening Collection and Use of FSN Data and Related Analysis Tools to improve decision-making in support of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. Dan Ericsson believes the recommendations will add value to strengthen food policies and inform investments.

In her keynote speech, Ms Annette Schneegans, Head of UN Section, Deputy Permanent Representative to FAO and Minister Counsellor at the European Union, emphasised that data standardisation and integration of different information systems are necessary for effective data utilization. She also underlined the strength of the institutional partnership that led to the Food Systems assessments and the resulting regional syntheses in view of achieving sustainable food systems transformation.

As one of the presenters, Ms Meeta Punjabi Mehta, Senior Food Systems Officer at the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO RAP), explained the crucial role of analysis and multistakeholder processes. She presented the regional cross-cutting analysis that derived from the food systems assessments in 50 countries, undertaken by a EU-FAO-CIRAD partnership and based on a systemic approach. Building on the country-specific assessments, the regional reports delve into the trade-offs or the costs of maintaining the status quo and offer insights into transition pathways. Finally, the presentation introduced the Sustainable Agrifood System Intelligence (SASI) initiative and the first outcomes of its implementation in Sierra Leone.

In her presentation, Ms Frida Sporre, from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, explained that data is often underutilized because isolated in silos, creating a fragmented overview for farmers and other stakeholders. To better grasp the issue, a study on the use of data was undertaken in 2020 which resulted in several recommendations to support the establishment of a national platform for data sharing. Consequently, the Agronod platform was created to collect and share data on food systems, from agricultural production to climate data. The platform acts as a digital farm for producers.

Ms Vivian Ribeiro, Senior Data Scientist, Stockholm Environment Institute, introduced the concept of data democratization, emphasizing the importance of not only making data transparent but also easily accessible. Ribeiro showcased the "Do Pasto ao Prato" app from Brazil, a product of the TRASE initiative that enables consumers to identify the origin of meat sold in supermarkets, thereby contributing to enhanced transparency in the value chain. This

approach also tries to stimulate consumption of sustainably produced and marketed products (e.g., avoiding deforestation linked to livestock expansion).

From the point of view of academia, Ms Maria Fernanda Mideros, Director of Agri-food Systems Research Center, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia, explained how local initiatives could be integrated into national public policies to promote inclusive development. For example, she cited PlaSa Colombia, a platform which consolidates and analyses data on local food systems in view of supporting decision-making at all levels. The information provided is concise and accessible and the platform is user-friendly. She emphasized the importance of defining trackable indicators at both country and regional levels to facilitate informed decision-making and follow-up initiatives.

Dr Abdoulaye Mohamadou, Executive Secretary, Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) presented the Cadre Harmonisé platform (or Harmonized Framework), developed in the early 2010s, to collect data on vulnerability and risks related to food insecurity in member countries. It shares information on food insecurity prediction for each country with their respective governments to help draw a response plan to tackle food insecurity, drought, or flooding. The platform was also established as a single date source for all partners in the region in view of reaching a policy consensus.

Mr Nick Jacobs, Agri-food, Trade and Development Policy, IPES Food, emphasized the need for a science-policy interface that uses scientific evidence to design effective policies. This approach considers decision-makers in all food chain functions, rather than analysing production, supply chains and retail in isolation. The objective is to identify cross-cutting trends that can inform decision-making on food systems, promoting a more sustainable and equitable food system through informed analysis and actionable insights.

The event concluded with a Q&A session with many questions from the floor and online participants.

Overall, the side event highlighted the importance of a robust and accessible foundation of data and analysis to collaborate with diverse stakeholders in the identification of policy options for sustainable food systems. Therefore, data analysis, evidence, good knowledge, and expertise are critical for private and public investment decisions.

"Investments, whether public or private, have to be evidence based for us at FAO. We look at our work as a de-risking mechanism for investments. Data, analysis, good knowledge, good expertise is the first port of de-risking for any investments," concluded Mohamed Manssouri, Director of FAO Investment Centre, who moderated the side-event.