

EXPERT WORKSHOP

Drivers and Agents of Agri-Food Systems Transformation

June 2023



A process hosted by:



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Drivers and Agents of Agri-Food Systems Transformation

Joint Conclusion

The second expert workshop of the project [Assessment of Climate Impacts of Food \(CLIF\)](#), funded by the German Federal ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, was conducted in Rome on the 15th and 16th of June 2023, in hybrid mode. The CLIF project involves publication of a series of strategic reports to serve as a guide for policymakers and decision-makers on [agri-food systems](#)¹ transformation, undertaken by the TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability, based in Berlin, Germany. The first strategic report was published in April 2023 as a three-part [FORESEE series](#).

The workshop aimed at

- (1) arriving at a common understanding of the drivers, levers and agents of agri-food system transformation
- (2) developing the key messages that will guide the drafting of the second strategic report.

The basis of the discussions was the second CLIF scoping study titled ‘Drivers and Agents of the Transformation of Agrifood Systems’ conducted by Nadia El-Hage Scialabba and the preliminary outline suggested by TMG for the second strategic report preliminarily titled ‘ADAPT: Agents and Drivers in Agri-Food Systems’ Pathways to Transformation’.

The diverse voices by the participating experts found resonance with the [13 key principles](#) to guide transformation outlined by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), in the context of the discussion. In this regard, the experts stressed on the three principles of rights-based approach, systems thinking, and transparency & accountability to guide the transformation process.

¹ ‘Agri-food systems encompass the entire range of actors, and their interlinked value-adding activities, engaged in the primary production of food and non-food agricultural products, as well as in storage, aggregation, post-harvest handling, transportation, processing, distribution, marketing, disposal and consumption of all food products including those of non-agricultural origin. Within agri-food systems, food systems comprise all food products that originate from crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and from other sources such as synthetic biology that are meant for human consumption.’ FAO. 2021. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2021*.

From the discussions over the course of the two days, the following key messages were proposed and agreed upon based on a broad consensus:

1. Agri-Food systems need to be framed in the perspective of being part of the solution rather than being discussed only as part of the problem. The transformation of agri-food systems needs to take a systems view of the current challenges and employ a rights-based approach to address these.
2. The Rio Conventions need to take a prominent role in the stewardship of the transformation of agri-food systems given its relevance to climate, biodiversity, and land degradation. In this regard, linking the national agri-food transformation pathway with the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) can catalyse transformation.
3. Transformation processes may not be scalable or replicable across contexts, but certain principles can guide the processes in different contexts. An iterative process based on the core values of ecosystem integrity, common good through transparency and accountability, and fostering equity and resilience can guide the transformation.
4. At the start of the transformation process, the necessary triggers and needs for transformation, followed by the identification of the barriers and obstacles to transformation need to be clearly uncovered. The pressing needs (e.g. nutrition, health) of communities for transformation of agrifood systems need to be linked to the opportunities and drivers for transformation. The roles of the different agents and their area of influence in the transformation process need to be properly defined.
5. Transformative processes must be community-led and government-supported, with adequate financing and investment from diversified sources. In this regard, determined political will is necessary to create an enabling environment for the transformation.
6. The role of non-mainstream alternatives like agroecological, traditional, and Indigenous agri-food systems needs to be incorporated in the transformation pathways. This must be supplemented by engaging youth and underrepresented communities in the transformation debate.
7. Globalization, trade and regulatory liberalization have considerably increased pressure on cost and specialization at the expense of diversity. In the light of the new geopolitical realities and more trade tensions, a stronger focus on food sovereignty appears logical.

8. The governance of the transformation needs to address the power imbalances across different actors in agri-food systems and rethink multistakeholder mechanism. Large food processors, wholesalers and retailers impose asymmetrical market power in supply chains.
9. The role of trade in facilitating transformation needs to be included in the debate as there are several possibilities even in the existing international trade laws that can be utilized to support transformative actions.
10. Technology can play an important role in the transformation provided social and technological innovations go hand in hand and there is a social and ethical control of such technologies.
11. The metrics used to highlight the success of businesses and the private sector need to be rethought and redefined in the light of the new paradigms and discourse on economic growth and its externalized costs.
12. For a successful implementation of the transformation pathways, monitoring and assessment of the transformative actions need to be undertaken. The True Cost Accounting (TCA) approach and the Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture (SAFA) guidelines provide the required starting point in this regard.
13. The transformation process will require a realignment of certain privileges and resources, for transformation constitutes radical change aimed at more equitable, resilient, and sustainable systems.

The scoping study and the report outline will be further revised based on the finalised version of this document and the feedback from the experts who could not participate in the workshop. Some of the changes that have already been earmarked for the case study include the addition of more case studies (e.g., case studies on blue economy) while as the inclusion of a transformation protocol in the report outline was also a result of the discussions at the workshop.

About the CLIF project

The workshop was conducted under the [Assessment and Communication of Climate Impacts of Food \(CLIF\)](#) project, funded through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and implemented by WWF Germany, corsus and TMG.