



Researchers to measure progress on improving food systems

Scientists around the world are worried that countries will not live up to the commitments they will make to transform food systems at the United Nations Food Systems Summit on 23 September. Today, over 200 scientists and research organizations like ATNI, who are currently monitoring the problem internationally, have launched an 'Accountability Pact' to significantly step up their monitoring of government and food company actions to make food systems much more sustainable, healthy, and equitable. This is to ensure that commitments made during the Summit are monitored appropriately to maximize impact.

The researchers are backing international calls for transformational changes because the current food systems fail to address three relevant issues:

- Malnutrition in all its forms (including undernutrition, overweight /obesity and micronutrient deficiencies), which is by far the biggest cause of disease and premature death in every country (causing 15-25% of healthy life-years lost annually)
- Environmental destruction, which contributes to 25-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions, uses over 70% of fresh water, and is the major cause of deforestation and biodiversity loss
- Economic inequities and cycles of poverty and poor nutrition

The researchers themselves are committing to expand their measurements of indicators such as whether governments are using taxes and subsidies to refocus food production and consumption towards healthier, more sustainable foods and whether food companies are abiding by WHO recommendations on food marketing to children and are implementing environmentally-friendly food policies.

Professor Boyd Swinburn from the University of Auckland, who leads an international food monitoring network called INFORMAS in over 60 countries, says "Robust, independent monitoring to track progress is essential because without strong accountability systems, we know for sure that business as usual for food systems will continue unabated. Humanity and the environment cannot afford for that to happen." He believes that international coalitions of scientists are needed to create the credible evidence to guide change. "The Accountability Pact offers a mechanism through which researchers commit to using their expertise to strengthen food systems monitoring for accountability purposes."

Ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit, multiple other coalitions are forming around action areas with governments and businesses signing up to commit to such things as regenerative farming, reducing food waste, realigning financial incentives and disincentives, and promoting healthy diets and sustainable eating patterns.

The benefits of good monitoring evidence include guiding priority actions, measuring progress, benchmarking across countries, and evaluating the impacts of policies and actions. Strong evidence also acts as a fundamental lever for change as the global demands from communities to investors for healthy and sustainable food systems gathers momentum.

Professor Jessica Fanzo from Johns Hopkins University is a co-leader of a new monitoring system called the Food Systems Dashboard and she emphasizes the need to monitor the underlying power dynamics within the food system to really understand where transformation is needed. She explains that “The indicators we measure need to include a focus on the structure and conduct of food systems and the performance in terms of critical outcomes, as well as how changes in food systems are governed.”

The researchers are developing ways to join up the existing food monitoring systems, amongst which the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, INFORMAS and the Access to Nutrition Initiative to name a few, as well as greatly increase the number of researchers involved in this important research. The Accountability Pact is a first step to fill the gap which is emerging in the lead up to the UN Food Systems Summit – who is going to hold these countries and companies to account for all the commitments they make on 23 September in the virtual Summit?

“As researchers, we need to do our bit to create food systems that can better deliver on human health and wellbeing, ecological health and wellbeing, social equity and economic prosperity,” said Professor Swinburn.

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Contacts:

Professor Boyd Swinburn boyd.swinburn@auckland.ac.nz +64 22 167 9636

Professor Jessica Fanzo jfanzo1@jhu.edu +1 (202) 340 9768

Further information

To view the Accountability Pact website, click [here](#). To sign the Accountability Pact, click [here](#). Register [here](#) for a free webinar 1 September 2021 (13:00 CEST, 07:00 EDT, 21:00 AEST) for: UN Food Systems Summit update, monitoring systems update, launch of the Accountability Pact, and next steps.

Background

The Accountability Pact surfaced out of the collaboration between the International Network for Food and Obesity/NCD Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS), Access To Nutrition Initiative (ATNI), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Measurement Evaluation, Accountability and Leadership Support for NCDs prevention (MEALS4NCDs), Food Prices for Nutrition, the Food Systems Dashboard, the EAT Forum and other organizations. This work has been made possible through the generous support of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

As a leverage point to catalyze evidence-informed food systems transformation, the Accountability Cycle offers monitoring experts a framework through which action can be realized (*roles for monitoring systems shown in italics*):

1. Setting the account: defining the objectives and targets for action (*converting high-level commitments to measurable indicators*);
2. Taking the account: measuring progress towards targets (*monitoring food policies, actions, environments, systems, and consumption*);
3. Sharing the account: communicating the results to decision-makers (*translating the research into accessible evidence*);
4. Holding to account: providing incentives and disincentives for those in power to act (*supporting the voices of other actors, eg civil society groups and investors*);
5. Responding to the account: taking action to improve food systems (*supporting action with evidence and expertise*).

An International Pact on Monitoring for Accountability for Action on Food Systems: 'The Accountability Pact'



An accountability framework for food systems monitoring.
Adapted from Kraak et al. 2014.