

There can be no sustainable development without profound changes in food systems

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Food systems are situated at the crossroads between the many issues and contradictions surrounding sustainable development: food and nutritional security, human and ecosystem health, natural resource renewal, climate change, territorial dynamics, political stability, and social justice. An international group of experts, including researchers from CIRAD, is calling for profound changes in food systems in order to meet the sustainable development goals (SDGs) set by the UN in 2015, and the terms of the Paris Agreement on climate. The authors propose a four-pillar strategy.

"There can be no sustainable development without profound changes in food systems". This call for change was issued by an international group of experts dubbed the "Milano Group" (see box), whose members have written an article published in the journal *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*.

Agriculture, the world's biggest employer

Food systems are not just vital for achieving SDG2 ("Zero hunger"); they concern the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **Since agriculture is the world's main source of employment**, investing in it is considered twice as effective at alleviating poverty than investing in any other sector. Farming practices are closely linked to ecosystem health, natural resource diversity and renewal, and climate change. Lastly, food insecurity and rural poverty are often the root cause of political instability, conflict and migration.

"We need to totally transform food systems"

While the overriding priority for agriculture was for a long time to increase production, this century has brought very different issues. For Patrick Caron, the lead author of the article, a researcher with CIRAD and Chair of the United Nations High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, "We need to implement a comprehensive transformation in food systems, centring on different paradigms and models from those of the 20th century".

This call for profound change was prompted by the Milano Group's discussions, which gave rise to a proposed four-pillar strategy:

- **Drastic changes in consumption patterns**, with a shift towards healthy eating
- Ensuring that **agricultural production and food supply chains play a greater role in sustainable development**
- **Mitigating climate change** by means of new farming practices
- A package of operations aimed at **rejuvenating rural territories**.

Renewing governance of food systems

These changes will not happen on their own. The transformation will hinge on renewing food system governance, giving priority to human development and food and nutritional security, rational resource management, ecosystem health, and fairer development and consumption models. This means adopting new ways of designing, planning and managing programmes to support production, consumption, innovation and rural development.

Science has a major role to play

Science has a major role to play in generating vital knowledge, particularly in the technical field, and also in pinpointing the

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Reference

[Food systems for sustainable development: proposals for a profound four-part transformation](#)

See also

- **[Patrick Caron: "Rural territories are forces for sustainable development"](#)**
- **[Étienne Hainzelin: "The urgency and complexity of the issue of food security call for a new perspective"](#)**
- **[A debate on the Sustainable Development Goals](#)**
- **[CIRAD and the sustainable development goals](#)**

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dynamics of transitions, identifying critical and emerging topics, characterizing interactions and compromised, clearing up disagreements between players, exploring possible future scenarios, and enlightening the decisions to be made regarding the solutions to be adapted to the various contexts.

Governance on a global level

Although changes are generally proposed and made on a local or national level, along very specific lines, the global scope and ambition of this transformation require a governance framework and processes on a global scale, particularly as regards processes for arbitration and for resolving tensions between local and global dynamics.

A new rural-urban social contract

Moreover, as Patrick Caron says: "**the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development relies on flourishing rural areas.** The interdependence of rural and urban areas must be acknowledged and used as the basis for a new rural-urban social contract. This would lay the foundations for a civilization that pays its rural areas and their inhabitants for the functions they fulfil and the public goods (commons) they provide for societies, the planet and economies."

The Milano Group

In 2015, the world's leaders reached agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The emphasis placed on climate action echoes the Paris Agreement on climate adopted the same year. Following these talks, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon convened an informal high-level meeting of experts and policymakers in Italy on World Food Day 2015. The members of what is now known as the "**Milano Group**" shared their views and built a **strategic framework for action linking climate, agriculture and food.** The participants, from a wide range of professional and geographical spheres, reached a unanimous agreement on **the need for a comprehensive transformation in food systems in order to meet the sustainable development goals and the terms of the Paris Agreement.**

David Nabarro, who was at the time Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, led the group's work. He is the co-winner of this year's **World Food Prize**, to be officially awarded in October 2018.

Reference

P. Caron, G. Ferrero y de Loma-Osorio, D. Nabarro, E. Hainzelin, M. Guillou, I. Andersen, T. Arnold, M. Astralaga, M. Beukeboom, S. Bickersteth, M. Bwalya, P. Caballero, B. M. Campbell, N. Divine, S. Fan, M. Frick, A. Friis, M. Gallagher, J.-P. Halkin, C. Hanson, F. Lasbennes, T. Ribera, J. Rockstrom, M. Schuepbach, A. Steer, A. Tutwiler & G. Verburg (2018). Food systems for sustainable development: proposals for a profound four-part transformation, *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*.

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