

2021 SIR JOHN CRAWFORD MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Five reflections to transform our food systems and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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Let me start my presentation by acknowledging and recognising The Honourable John Anderson, and the leadership of The Crawford Fund in general. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you all, to engage with you all in this conversation that we have had over the last two years under the Food Systems Summit that was led by the UN Secretary-General. It is a pity that I cannot join you in Australia: I would have loved to. When we started towards this Summit, my ambition

was that we would reach every person, to the extent possible, and make sure that we are joining hands in the transformation of our food systems; so I feel this gap in my ability to be with you and engage you personally. But these are the times we are living in, and I am going to talk to you through this Zoom conversation.

As many of you know, the Secretary-General two years ago launched what we now call the 2021 Food Systems Summit. Every year we commemorate World Food Day, and on that day in mid-October at the World Food Summit of 2019 he announced he was going to launch a Food Systems Summit in 2021. Two months later, I got a call and was asked to be part of leading this Summit.

I already have a day job: I work as a full-time President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA); I have two kids; I was not looking for another job. But I have been working on the African continent for some time now in the agricultural sector, and every day we see the challenge of how farmers are struggling – and although the continent had started recovering, that recovery now seems far away. I realised that this call was not something that I could let go; it is an opportunity to work with everybody together to find solutions to some of the challenges we are seeing. So I said yes to the challenge.

Now I will tell you the story of how we did it: the story of the last two years. How we set in motion a process that would help us engage the world and ensure that we come out with a clear idea of how we might be able to transform our food system; a clear understanding of the challenges of the world's food systems; a clear way of ensuring that every person in the world understands their role. Then, as I end this conversation with you, I will share a few reflections that will help us understand how we go forward from here.

This record of the 2021 Sir John Crawford Memorial Address on 13 December has been prepared from transcripts.

On that day in 2019 when the Secretary-General launched the Food Systems Summit, what he was looking for was to ensure that we use the power of food; that we unleash the power of food to deliver on all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Secretary-General said that food has the ability to help us deliver across all 17 SDGs. He said that food is so powerful because it is important to all of us; it brings us together as families, as communities, as nations; it underpins many of our cultures; and it offers huge economic opportunities for lots of countries around the world.

He said that if there is one thing that can bring us together in a conversation, it is to start working on how we might fix our food system. But he also was recognising that our food system is becoming a challenge to our environment and to how we deliver – and I am going to take you through all these aspects.

Food system challenges

Here are the points the Secretary-General recognised as challenges.

First, that the world has been working for some time towards producing enough food – as you in Australia would know; you are one of the countries and continents that figured out, very early, that producing food for export is also an opportunity for economic growth. But despite what we are achieving, as a world, in food production, and despite the fact that over 50 years ago we recognised the need to produce more food, we still have millions of people who are hungry. We still have 820 million people who go to bed hungry, and that number has even gone up because of COVID-19.

Second, that a number of people are malnourished. People's potential is still being completely diluted by the types of vitamins they have in their diets. Still over 45% of the children of this world, especially in developing countries, are not achieving their potential because of malnutrition. On the other hand, about two billion people are obese or overweight, and as a result they are subject to all sorts of illnesses. This is part of our food system.

Third, that in the midst of all that, our food system is contributing to climate change. We now know that 30% of contributions towards climate change come from our food system.

And fourth, that our food system's most significant damage is to biodiversity. We are losing biodiversity at such a rate that 80% is the figure that we are now talking about as biodiversity loss resulting from how we manage our food system and what we are trying to do to get food and make it less expensive, at any cost.

These are things that need to stop.

We also now know that hundreds of zoonotic diseases are beginning to impact our world in ways they have not done before, because our food system is in closer proximity to our environment: probably too close for comfort.

There is no question that we need to do a few things going forward.

- We definitely must deal with the challenge of hunger, paying attention to the related challenges around nutrition.



Dr Agnes Kalibata delivered the Sir John Crawford Memorial Address via Zoom.

- We need to shift consumption habits and to be a little bit more aware of how our consumption and diets can be more sustainable for the world's climate.
- We need to fix our environmental challenges. We need to start thinking about how protecting our environment and its capacity for regeneration might be done in the years ahead.
- We need to think about equity: COVID-19 has shown us that there are so many people in the world who cannot feed their families with a decent meal. This is something that we need to address.
- We need to address the challenges of resilience. There are many people that are living from one shop to another. Here in Africa we have become used to the fact that out of every two seasons, one season will fail.

These are things that we have to fix. We cannot postpone them. These are not things we can pass on to the next generation. These are things we need to deal with today.

Among my own personal priorities, and from an African continent perspective, I am one hundred per cent committed to ensuring that as a continent we understand what is at stake, that we understand the link between today's farming systems and climate change. Today African farmers still produce yields at the expense of the environment: 30% of our production comes from using new land nearly every year, and we have a huge impact on biodiversity loss. These are things we definitely can do something about.

With all this in mind we put the Food Systems process in motion, and really focused on a few things:

- (i) on how we might use the food system to recover from COVID-19, and
- (ii) how we might use the food system to deliver on SDGs, and
- (iii) how we might use our thinking about food systems to start understanding the types of transformations that are required in our food system.

A People's Summit

We recognised that we needed to be bold, we needed to be ambitious, and we needed to go as far as we could. So we focused first of all on making this a People's Summit, asking ourselves what type of people do we need to bring on board? Where? When? Who is being left out? And who needs to come into this conversation?

We cast our net very wide. I was telling the team, as we started, that we need to reach five billion people, which means that every adult in this world would need to know what is at stake from a food systems perspective.

Each of us eats three times a day – apart from the 820 million people that are struggling for food – and each of those meals has an implication for our food system, and so we needed to bring in as many people as possible. So we made it a People's Summit, and I want to tell you now how that has worked.

- We reached out to a diverse range of 'actors' to engage, be heard, and act in their own ways: countries; consumers; the private sector; producers; civil society; youth activists; indigenous leaders; scientists; and many others.
- We had a scientific group that had a network of over 25 scientific institutions that were working to ensure that what we do in the Food Systems Summit is anchored in science.
- We literally opened the door to everyone, to ensure that the conversation was happening in all corners of the world.
We have since had hundreds of independent dialogues; recently we celebrated the 1000th independent dialogue. Independent dialogues are spaces where different groups of people are coming together, not because they are part of government but because they care about where the world is going and the impact our food system is having, to have real conversations around how things can change.
- We also put governments into the 'drivers seat', so they understand that at the end of the day this work happens at a country level, and that governments are going to have to accept their responsibility to lead. As a result, governments have also had hundreds of dialogues – over 600 national dialogues now. We shall see what all that has produced.

A Solutions Summit

We also made it a Solutions Summit. In addition to reaching out to as many people as we could, we also wanted to ensure that we were mobilising as many ideas and as many solutions as possible. We do not have a lot of time, so we wanted not to sit and talk but instead to build on we already had. What we already had were thousands of ideas sitting in so many different spaces, so many different institutions, and we needed to bring them together.

- We put in place 'action tracks' across the areas that I mentioned that are very critical to our food system. Through these action tracks, we were able to mobilise over 2200 ideas that have since been clustered into 52 solution clusters.

A solution cluster is where you find the institutions behind ideas and the people behind these institutions, and they are available to help countries develop and to help different people deal with the different challenges of our world.

For example, sustainable livestock: if you have a community that is trying to understand how to address the challenge of sustainable livestock, we have a solution cluster that brings all the relevant institutions and all the relevant experts together in one place, where you can, at a click of a button, understand who to go to and where to find ideas.

In this, we were mobilising and building on ideas that already exist.

- We also chose to lean into ‘courageous conversations’, and really talk about trust and the whole idea of the level of trust within our midst. If you followed our Summit closely, you will know that a number of people in the Summit were not happy about certain things, especially in relation to the private sector. But you know what? When you have challenges in your midst, the easiest way to deal with them is probably to face them, rather than push them aside.
- We made sure that we were encouraging people to talk about what was not working in our system; what parts of our society were not delivering in the ways we should have been delivering, and why; and how to make sure that those spaces were becoming available.
- We certainly would like the private sector to do things differently. There are opportunities for them to do things differently – whether it is from a nutrition perspective; whether it is from a business perspective and rethinking business models; whether it is all the things that could happen to impact our environment, and the private sector’s opportunities to do things differently. They, like our governments, have to rethink their models.
- Of course, our governments have to rethink their models too. Right now, the agricultural sector is driven largely by subsidies that are probably influencing the wrong behaviour. The scientific group wrote a paper on this: the opportunity to repurpose these subsidies, so as to enhance better behaviour for people and for the environment, is sitting right there.

These are all conversations that we needed to have.

- There was the conversation around consumers and how each of us, you and I, waste so much food, contributing to US\$1 trillion loss in waste food and 80% to emissions.

These are things we do not need; these are things that we can do without.

- Also we recognised that we needed to engage better with civil society, and for them to engage better. They wanted to present issues that are very important to us, and to discuss those issues, and we made it very clear that there were spaces in the Summit where they could come in and address those issues. We welcomed them.

Many of them took up that opportunity. Many others of them decided to voice the issues from outside. We took note of those issues, and we still encourage all

of us to sit around a table when an opportunity like this presents itself, so that we can build trust rather than continue building differences among us.

The results of the Summit

All these processes were very important to ensuring that we have a few critical things going forward.

The most important of those was the Secretary-General's statement, being very clear about areas where he wanted to see governments providing action and providing leadership. He highlighted five areas that he will be monitoring and revisiting every two years to see the progress we are making.

- The first and most important area is about **nourishing people**.
- The second area is about attending to **environmental issues**.
- The third is about delivering on **equity**.
- The fourth is about focusing on **resilience**.
- And the fifth area is **implementing action** on all these challenges.

Member states also stepped forward in a strong way – 164 member states. Of those, more than 90 Heads of State and Government, including 77 Presidents, spoke about the work they had been doing preparing for the Summit, and about their commitments as individual countries, and how they were going to tackle those commitments.

By the date of the Summit there were 148 countries having national dialogues: that is, spaces where countries are coming together to discuss how different sectors can work together to deliver a food systems transformation. Those transformations are delivered to the Summit process through what we are calling national pathways, and 103 national pathways were delivered by the time of the Summit. The number of national pathways is still growing and has reached 110 now. I was particularly proud that the African continent engaged very well.

The African continent and many other developing places probably had reasons not to engage in this Summit. The question I keep being asked is: Summits and Summits and Summits ... what comes out of them? We told them that this was going to be different. It was going to be different in the sense that it engages, and that it needs all of us to engage.

This Summit is not about who owes what to whom. It is not about who helps whom deliver what. It is about how we, as a world, are engaged, and how we as individuals start delivering together. So I was very proud to see that the African continent stepped forward, not just as 49 countries that were engaged but with a clear common continental position that is informing how they go forward and whose key indicators are being proposed for adjusting the continental framework they have on food, so that they can also add food systems indicators.

A number of countries came together in what we are calling 'coalitions'. Coalitions are spaces and areas where people felt that no one country, no one nation, no one institution can come through alone.

There were 30 multi-stakeholder coalitions. Examples include a school feeding coalition, which is extremely important to the 321 million children that are going

without a meal. There is a sustainable production coalition, and a blue food coalition. Also, a number of coalitions were launched, including a coalition called aim for climate. All these are extremely important to helping us think through how we work together as a community.

There were more than 230 other commitments – we provided a commitments registry – remembering that the Secretary-General had called for all of us to commit to doing things differently. The commitments range from something as small as a community in Nepal committing to reduce the amount of erosion on their slopes, to something as big as the school feeding coalition which has more than 40 countries and several institutions subscribed to it.

We engaged many networks, and we registered what we are calling ‘constituency statements’ as well. In each constituency, whether it was producers, whether it was civil society, whether it was indigenous people, whether it was private sector, or youth, we told them – and we were very clear – that **we come here not looking for answers from other people; we come here looking to provide answers ourselves**. We asked them to tell us how they would provide answers to problems we are having as a world. And they provided declarations that contained their commitments; how they see themselves as a community contributing to how our world is changing.

In attending many of these meetings, delegates usually expect someone else to solve the problem, but here we put heavy emphasis on ‘the solution to the problem starts with you; what is your commitment?’. Communities made declarations, and they are recorded in a compendium that we put together and which is available on the Food Systems Summit website*. A Science Reader has also put together all the papers run by the Scientific Group, and you can access that on the website as well. It publishes world class material that helps shape where we are going.

Of all the surprising things that I feel we achieved, probably the most gratifying was how much we elevated the discourse on the political relevancy of food systems on the global agenda, and how countries and individuals and communities are now thinking differently about food. We set out to change the paradigm around food – from ‘food’ to ‘food systems’ – and to move from silos to systemic thinking, and we feel that thinking is now ‘on the table’. Of course, the question now is how we go forward and how we deliver on that paradigm shift, and I will come to that in a second. But there was no question in my mind or that of anybody who participated in the Summit that we definitely elevated the discourse on food systems.

Australia, specifically, engaged in a number of ways – such as in food systems dialogues and in action tracks – leading to a number of ideas that I have mentioned. Australians participated in some of the emerging coalitions. Someone who was managing the Food Systems Summit Secretariat made a contribution focused on supporting developing states and small island states so that they could participate. That participation was mostly because we had resources to facilitate that, and Australia provided leadership here.

* <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

What we wanted from Australia

Australia did as we hoped, to a large extent, but we also want Australia to post its food systems pathway. We want Australia to have its food systems strategies out in public. We want Australia to provide the leadership that we are looking for, recognising fully well that this food system conversation, this food systems transformation, is not just a developing country agenda: it is as much a developed country agenda as it is a developing country problem. None of us can succeed if all of us do not engage. I strongly encourage Australia to finish some of the processes that we have started.

We will be looking forward to Australia posting your food systems pathway, and we want to learn from the strategies that you are designing. Australia has done a lot of research and a lot of work in climate-smart agriculture that the world can benefit from, so please do make that available, and be part of leading from the front and supporting everybody else.

From Summit to action

To follow up all this work, the Secretary-General has put in place a hub that is to start in January 2022. The work of the Secretariat that I was leading closes by the end of December 2021 – and it is very important that happens. We need to shift from a Summit thought-process and a dialogue thought-process, where everybody is engaged in conversation, to an action thought-process where everybody focuses on delivery.

I am really happy that my team and I have brought us this far, and that my team and I are closing business on dialogues so that a new team can begin with a focus on action, so that the world adopts the message that **it is time to shift into implementation and action** – and takes action.

The hub is to be based in the Director-General's Office at FAO. It is an independent hub that will support coordination to ensure that we think now with a food systems approach, and avoid falling back into siloed thinking. The hub will report back to the Secretary-General so that at the end of two years the Secretary-General can report to the Heads of State about the commitments that they made and about how well we are making progress on those commitments. The hub will ensure that we maintain connection and engagement with the countries and people who were appropriately engaged in the Summit process – the world that we reached out to, including the producers, the indigenous people, the youth that we engaged in new ways and helped to understand their individual roles. The hub will also focus on how to continue providing support to that community so that they can continue understanding their individual roles and start shaping how we all deliver together.

Reflections

Now I want to share a few reflections on some of the points that we must be looking at as we go forward.

There is no question that the Summit has set us on the right path, but setting out well is only a quarter of the journey, as a popular Spanish proverb says. Our feet are pointing in the right direction; our minds are engaged; our institutions

and countries are all engaged, but this is only the beginning. The rest of the work needs to happen.

We need to start demonstrating that we can deliver without being in silos: that we can work together as sectors. In my own country, Rwanda, as Minister of Agriculture I worked with different Ministries to be able to deliver on some of the challenges we had. Being a small country, we quickly hit our environmental limit, and being able to work together was important for us. So working together is doable; I have seen it in action. We can do this: sectors coming together and delivering together.

Some countries are already beginning to think about how communities can engage in very deliberate and very significant ways. How all of us can align around critical issues, as we have seen with coalitions. This is something we can do. We are just beginning, and I am one hundred per cent sure that we can deliver action.

These are my thoughts, as hunger persists and as malnutrition and poverty and environmental degradation continue; as we strive to make a better future for our children, and to deliver on the SDGs; and also as we remain on track not to overshoot the 1.5 degrees.

There is no question that we must focus on doing the right thing.

- First, we need to think about a **holistic approach** and how we do that at country level. A country-led approach is essential, empowering countries irrespective of where they are, ensuring that we are working together as countries with clear plans and clear strategies, recognising again that the agenda for a southern country is just as critical as the agenda for a northern country. Here in Africa we experience the impacts of climate change, though many of the farmers that lose crops every season do not even know what climate change is about and have contributed nothing to it. There cannot be success unless we all work on achieving success. That is very important. Countries need to align internally, and regionally and globally, and we all need to think through what working together looks like.
- My second point is about **embracing innovation**. That shone through all the 2200 ideas that came up for the Summit. The world can produce plenty of innovation, but the world is on a very fast-moving treadmill, you might say, and we need to be thinking about the types of innovations that are needed to keep us on course while also ensuring we are building *sustainability* into our systems. Is it about different diets – as people were talking about meat alternatives? Is it about regenerative agriculture? Is it about climate-smart agriculture, and better tools and new ways to do that? Is it about carbon farming, moving from the huge jurisdictions that we are seeing today, to smallholder scale, recognising that the smallholder farmers are part of our global farming system? Or is it about the true value of food, recognising that we are paying in the wrong places – that we are paying for malnutrition and obesity instead of paying for good nutrition; that we are paying for environmental damage instead of paying for good agricultural practices? These are things we must think through and innovate around.

- Third: **inclusion**. I mentioned to you how COVID-19 has laid us bare on inclusion. It doesn't matter where in the world you look: in each of our countries there are people who are unable to put the right meal on the table; there are people that are living just one season away from failure in their systems; there are people whose earnings have been completely eroded; and there are food value chains that are not remunerating people well enough for them to be able to feed their families.

Is this right? Is this how we must continue? We can't afford this! We need to do something about it. We need to be deliberate around inclusion; around women and how we bring them into value chains; around youth and how we create jobs; and around decent work and how value chains remunerate people for the right type of work.

- Fourth, we need to continue leaning into **courageous conversations**. One of the things that gives me hope is seeing COP26 (26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, Glasgow, November 2021) – seeing how much countries were engaged around the types of changes we need to be having in our systems, recognising that we will overshoot the 1.5 degrees. It does not matter whatever economic systems we are nurturing and protecting today, the crash will come if we do not do the right things. For us, living on the equator, for these farmers, the crash is already here. So it is time for those conversations around the types of energies we need, the types of factories we need.

The time has come for us to understand that we have a finite planet and we need to manage it as a finite resource and we need to understand that we need to do it together. Whether it is a business working in the food value chain or a business somewhere else, these conversations need to be had, and to include conversations around nutrition. Why would one in every two people have obesity when we know the right thing that needs to be done?

We have the ability to fix many of these situations that we live with. We also have the ability to have conversations that allow us to start remodelling our businesses. We are people; we have creativity; we have the ability to do this. We just need to get it done.

- My fifth point is about putting **science at the centre** of this. I completely believe that we need to use science and that science must direct the decisions we make. Science uses the evidence that is in our midst, and should inform our policies. Let us not turn a blind eye nor a deaf ear to science. Let us do the right thing.

Conclusion

Finally, I want to conclude as I started. I told you that we set out to reach individuals; to reach each person among us; to engage everyone in what we can do as institutions.

One of the things that I was proud of during the time of the Summit was seeing Louise Fresco, who heads the Wageningen University & Research Executive Board, stepping forward and saying: We've just made all the research we've

done, over all the years, publicly available so that countries that don't have the ability to do this type of research can have this material available to them. I wanted to say: Thank you for your great leadership, recognising that many of our countries and our universities and our research institutions would take thousands of years to reach where the Netherlands is in its research. That type of leadership is going to be vital.

We need to start defining that type of leadership.

Here at AGRA, the institution I lead, work has mostly in the past focused on ensuring farmers have access to good inputs, because when Kofi Annan started this institution he thought that the missing link was that African farmers did not have improved seed; they did not have access to good fertilisers, nor to good ways of applying those fertilisers. But things have since moved on, and now we need to think about sustainable farming.

I am trying to make sure my institution understands that working farmers have access to carbon farming, that they understand what that means, that they understand restoration and are taking responsibility for some of the restoration that needs to happen.

Governments also need to understand that farmers cannot work alone. As a result, we are working with governments to help them understand the policy environment, the capacities that are needed to be able to ensure that farmers in Africa can use the agricultural sector as an opportunity rather than seeing it as a burden in which they are stuck in poverty.

That is a commitment that I have made in the work that I do every day.

In my institution we keep asking ourselves – and the constituencies we work through – about our commitment. We ask (via a forum that we have on the African continent): How will you lead? I just told you how I will lead from an AGRA perspective and from an African perspective.

I pose the same question to Australia as a government: How will you lead?

I pose it to ACIAR and CSIRO: How will you lead on your research and on improvements of food systems?

And I pose it to businesses and the private sector: How will you lead our world going forward?

How would you want us to lead? Do you all recognise – and I know you do, and I don't want to be patronising about this – that we have to ask ourselves the same question: How will we lead?

One thing is for a fact: our planet is finite. We have to make sure that in our lifetime we use the incredible opportunity we have in our midst to do things together. The food system has highlighted that, and brought us together on the critical issues of our food system.

We need to make sure that our legacy is defined by what we did well together to put our planet back on track, and not defined by how we left a huge burden to future generations. So, if you ask me, there is only one option: let us focus on transforming our food system.

I look forward to seeing what you will do as Australia, and what we manage to do as a global community together, because I know there are so many people that are calling in to this conference from different parts of the world, and you all and us and I have a huge responsibility to leave this world back on track.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to talk to you.

As the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Dr Kalibata worked with the United Nations system and key partners to provide leadership, guidance and strategic direction towards the 2021 Food Systems Summit. She was responsible for outreach and cooperation with key leaders, including governments, to ensure the Summit serves as a catalytic process within the Decade of Action to improve food systems around the world to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement.

Born in Rwanda to smallholder farmers displaced during the struggle for independence in the early 1960s, Dr Kalibata grew up at a refugee camp in Uganda, where her parents grew beans and maize, and kept cows. The education of Dr Kalibata and her siblings was funded through the family's income from agriculture, ultimately allowing her to study entomology and biochemistry at Makerere University before earning her PhD from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

After graduating, Dr Kalibata joined the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) at Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute, where she started a career as a research scientist through a combination of research and study between IITA and Makerere University, and the IITA and University of Massachusetts, before returning to Rwanda to become the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) from 2008 to 2014. In this time, Dr Kalibata drove programs that supported smallholders like her father and helped the country recover from continued impacts of the 1994 genocide to food security.

The success of Dr Kalibata's tenure as agriculture minister contributed towards moving her country from a food insecure to a food secure status, becoming a reference point for other countries that sought to deliver agriculture transformation.

Since 2014, Dr Kalibata has also served as President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), where she leads the organisation's efforts with public and private partners to ensure a food-secure and prosperous Africa through rapid, sustainable agricultural growth, improving the productivity and livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers in Africa.

Dr Kalibata has a distinguished track record as an agricultural scientist, policymaker and thought leader. She has been awarded the Yara Prize, now the Africa Food Prize; an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Liège; an Honorary Doctorate from McGill University; and the Public Welfare Medal of the National Academy of Sciences for her work to drive Africa's agricultural transformation through modern sciences and effective policy, thereby improving livelihoods of smallholder farmers.