

## Wyss Academy Declaration on Food Systems

### *Purpose of the Wyss Academy Dialogues*

Humankind faces a triple challenge over the next 30 years; feeding ten billion people, keeping the global temperature increase below 1.5 °C and reversing biodiversity loss.

Tackling those challenges requires an integrated view and collective systemic action. To succeed, social and environmental justice must underpin this endeavor and, like a compass, guide this new thinking on nature, and structure interactions among different actors from science to policy and practice with varying world views, values, knowledge systems and needs.

Transforming the food system is key for reversing biodiversity loss, tackling the climate emergency, and fighting inequality and poverty. Therefore, the upcoming *Food Systems Summit* must address these issues by promoting an integrated view of the three goals of climate protection, biodiversity conservation and food security by focusing on the interfaces of those topics. The *Food Systems Summit* must promote a whole-of-society approach to address this challenge by fostering sustainable food systems and promote pathways for a global food system that builds on social equity and justice, acknowledging that this transformation will require radical changes.

### ***We represent:***

With the *Wyss Academy Dialogues with Purpose*, the newly established Wyss Academy for Nature at the University of Bern, Switzerland, offers a space for discussing pressing policy issues at the interface between nature and people. It brings together stakeholders from four Regional Stewardship Hubs it is currently establishing in Central Europe, East Africa, South America and Southeast Asia, involving research, business, policy and civil society.

The *Wyss Academy Dialogues with Purpose* promote cross-regional knowledge exchange and aim to elevate the voice of those who often do not have access to global policy discussions. The dialogues provide a platform for stakeholders to shape the global agenda and debate and foster learning about innovative ideas and initiatives that have been tested in concrete contexts. They promote science that is put into service of local needs to help design novel, concrete pathways towards sustainable development.

Participants from the four regions in which the Wyss Academy for Nature operates joined the first *Wyss Academy Dialogues with Purpose* on “Harmonizing food systems and nature conservation: Towards just nature-people relations”. These regions differ: In Switzerland agriculture is highly industrialized; in Peru and Laos our activities evolve around smallholder agriculture at forest frontiers; and in northern Kenya the food system is characterized by a long tradition of pastoralism and more recent smallholder and large-scale commercial agriculture. Despite those differences, the dialogues demonstrated that similar challenges are shared across the four regions in their transformation towards a just and sustainable food system and identified the following entry points:

- *promoting opportunities for the youth* in the food system,
- *realizing nature-positive and just food production*, as well as
- *bridging the disconnect between consumers and producers towards fairer food supply chains.*

The synthesized regional perspectives were incorporated into the discussion with global stakeholders and renowned experts. The global dialogue verified and refined the outcomes from the regional conversations and emphasized the importance of additional, cross-cutting points:

- The role of power asymmetries in the food system, with the poorest and the non-humans paying the prize.
- The importance of contextualized, local solutions, incorporating local knowledge, people and perspectives.
- The recognition of the interactions between food systems and health systems, with healthy food depending on healthy environments.
- The role of emotions as important drivers of change for the transformation towards a sustainable food system.
- The importance of gender equality for a sustainable food system.
- Focusing on the true cost of food in terms of unpacking the value of the food system.

### ***Our Call to Action***

To harmonize food systems with nature and climate protection and human wellbeing, just nature-people relations must be put center stage. We call for recognizing, harnessing and protecting the wealth of knowledge from diverse systems, including lay, practical and local knowledge that can help us make our global food system more just, sustainable and resilient.

We consider promoting *opportunities for youth* in the food system, *realizing nature positive and just food production and bridging the disconnect between consumers and producers* to be mutually reinforcing if the right levers are deployed. In this context those levers would mean to 1) create governance structures and financial mechanisms that foster sustainable agriculture, fair food chains and healthy diets, 2) provide incentives and economic support for the youth to seek a career along the food value chain, as well as 3) empowerment, self-determination, dignity, the protection of rights and participation, allowing for engaged communities along the entire food chain that are encouraged to set development priorities and hold decision-makers accountable.

Accountability and transparency in sustainable resources and land use can bring more justice and equity to agricultural production and natural resource management. Sustainable land stewardship that perceives land, water and agrobiodiversity as part of the *global commons*, represents the entry point to develop multiple-benefit strategies for cultivating diversified food production systems, transforming production and consumption habits, restoring our ecosystems, enhancing the resilience in the climate emergency, contributing to local livelihoods and promoting human wellbeing.

However, to holistically address the climate and biodiversity emergency, fight inequality and achieve human wellbeing, the following principles must be applied:

- Valuing existing knowledge and tailoring it to a specific context to explore novel approaches.
- Sharing learnings, including across regions to assess the scalability of innovative ideas.
- Promoting locally adapted solutions that combine the best of local as well as scientific knowledge systems.
- Ensuring justice within societies by understanding the barriers as well as the incentives that cause injustice in the given contexts.

*We thus call for acknowledging complexity*, as out of the myriad of solutions from the micro to the meso scale, the best approaches will very much depend on biophysical, socio-economic and cultural

conditions, governance and policy framework, as well as specific drivers of change, including fiscal incentives.

*We call for removing systemic barriers and celebrating diversity*, as solutions considering the specificities of the given context and which have been developed in a collaborative, holistic and integrated way, enhance the resilience of agricultural and food systems to pests, pathogens and the climate emergency. At the same time, those solutions must also promote gender equality and human wellbeing. *We also must draw knowledge* from diverse systems, in promoting transdisciplinary approaches, and in bringing together scientific, lay, practical and indigenous knowledge and different world views.

*We call for embracing the freshness of perspective* from the youth and answer to the fundamental questions they dare to raise and which have been buried for too long.

*We call upon governments* to implement governance structures and set the right incentives that reflect the ambition of creating just nature people relations and a sustainable food system. *We urge the financial and private sector* to use their capabilities and power for positive change. *We call upon research* to support the transformation through knowledge, including asking the uncomfortable questions related to power in our unsustainable food system. *We require civil society* to accept the shared responsibility and become agents of change.

Engaging on one front is not enough, only collective action can trigger the necessary transformation.

This collective call to action is also reflected in our three entry points, each of them relating to one or several Action Tracks of the Food System Summit 21<sup>1</sup>:

- Promoting employment and decent work for the youth mirrors measures proposed in Action Track 4 *Advance equitable livelihoods*. To further this goal, *governance structures must change, including tackling the political economy that creates perverse incentives*, and developing a new communication approach to increase the attractiveness of the food sector for the *youth and enhance their opportunities*; setting the right incentives and creating new employment opportunities within the sector prevents a “youth drain” and the loss of traditional knowledge. Youth has to have access to finance, in order for it to deploy its full potential to innovate and co-create new solutions and financial institution need to be convinced to invest in young farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Boosting nature-positive food production, as proposed by Action Track 3, requires a food system governance that reduces resource intensity to stop biodiversity loss, pollution and water and soil degradation, while recognizing and protecting the rights and needs of smallholder farmers, livestock keepers, fishers and hunters. This must go hand in hand with embracing multifunctional landscapes with diversified agricultural systems that build on the principles of agroecology as one specific entry point. In this context, land tenure security is a prerequisite for sustainable food systems, as secure access to land for land users can create incentives for the sustainable use of land. In this light, the financial sector needs to abandon financing unsustainable practices and finance innovative solutions that contribute to nature-positive food production.
- Bridging the divide between consumers and producers in order to ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all and shift to sustainable consumption patterns, the interests of consumers and producers must be aligned to provide nutritious food at affordable prices,

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<sup>1</sup> [Action Tracks | United Nations](#)

while ensuring a fair and livable income for producers. We call for addressing power structures in value chains that deepen the disconnect, by internalizing transparency and true costs, as part of redesigning food systems policy frameworks. One way to achieve this is by redirecting power towards consumers and producers, for example by shortening the food chain, strengthening local food networks and build consumer demand for sustainable food. Similarly, Action Track 1 promotes *access to safe and nutritious food for all*, while Action Track 2 calls for a *shift to sustainable consumption patterns*.

### ***Our commitment and offer***

The Wyss Academy is committed to contribute to harmonizing food systems with nature conservation, climate protection and human wellbeing. In this transformation, we take responsibility for ourselves and our actions. Our commitment is driven by the ambition to establish just nature-people relations. Instead of aiming for a general, global solution, we recognize the necessity to co-create context specific solutions with local stakeholders and aim to act as a facilitator for local conversations, decisions and actions. In this endeavor, we want to empower the powerless and ensure that the voices of the voiceless is heard. This pledge is reflected on the following three levels:

#### **1. Engagement for broader policy frameworks supporting the transformation of food systems**

Building on the first *Wyss Academy Dialogue with Purpose*, we are committed to further provide a safe space to discuss how obstacles in existing policy frameworks can be overcome and inspire a new social contract with nature. Our goal is for the most convenient and affordable choices in the food system to also be the most sustainable ones, recognizing the needs of those people who do not have the freedom or ability to make a choice. For this goal, we will focus, inter alia, on addressing market failures, advocating for the internalization of externalities within the food system, protecting the rights and intellectual property especially of indigenous groups and food and nutrition policy transformation towards food security and affordable healthy diets. Together, we aim to break the power structures in the food value chain, to move from power asymmetries to enable equity and participation. Furthermore, we will provide and promote policy support for broad scaling of innovative ideas and projects that grassroots organizations and local communities have piloted.

#### **2. Knowledge sharing and intergenerational learning**

We will build and use our network to help share and communicate the abundance of solutions for nature-positive and just food production, innovative ideas and initiatives, including novel ways of social interactions, that exist or are under development. We want to build trust in knowledge-based solutions by communicating knowledge inclusively and tailored to relevant stakeholders, which shall in turn allow for trust-building in our institution. We want to connect various actors through our network to enable political change, collective learning and education, and the multiplication of successful approaches. The network will also link our four regions for cross-regional learning, as rising inequalities, climate change and biodiversity loss require novel systemic approaches. It will further bring knowledge on transformative solutions to global policy fora. Intergenerational learning by connecting youth to other stakeholders, will be key to our engagement.

#### **3. Innovation and incubation**

For the co-creation of innovative solutions that focus on harmonizing food systems and nature conservation, we will promote bold and experimental collaborations between researchers, resource users, policy makers, civil society, and the private sector, creating new communities of practice. We

want to use the power of knowledge, combined with the power of positive emotions, to inspire change and empower change agents. We want to encourage actors, especially women and youth, to go beyond business as usual. We strive to identify options for navigating complex land systems and involve agents of change to initiate transformation across space and scale. We source innovative ideas and co-create projects that will be incubated and tested in specific contexts where there is local demand for such ideas. For this, we offer seed funding with the objective to ensure post-incubation and integration in the local context once our involvement has concluded.

Drawing from all endeavors undertaken in the past decades, it has become evident that continuing to work through gradual, incremental, single-point interventions is insufficient to solve the triple challenge of our times: Feeding ten billion people, substantially limiting global temperature rise and reversing biodiversity loss. This requires a radically novel approach.

What is needed is inclusive stakeholder engagement for the development of innovative solutions, and a fundamental transformation of economic, social and financial systems to support tackling this triple challenge and promoting just nature-people relations. With our commitment we connect to the Summits' Action Tracks as well as the points raised by our regional and global experts. The Wyss Academy for Nature has made it its mission to catalyze solutions that transform interactions between people and nature towards more just and sustainable relations, using the power of knowledge and the creativity of engagement. Together with our partners we want to be part of this transformation that is more urgent than ever.