

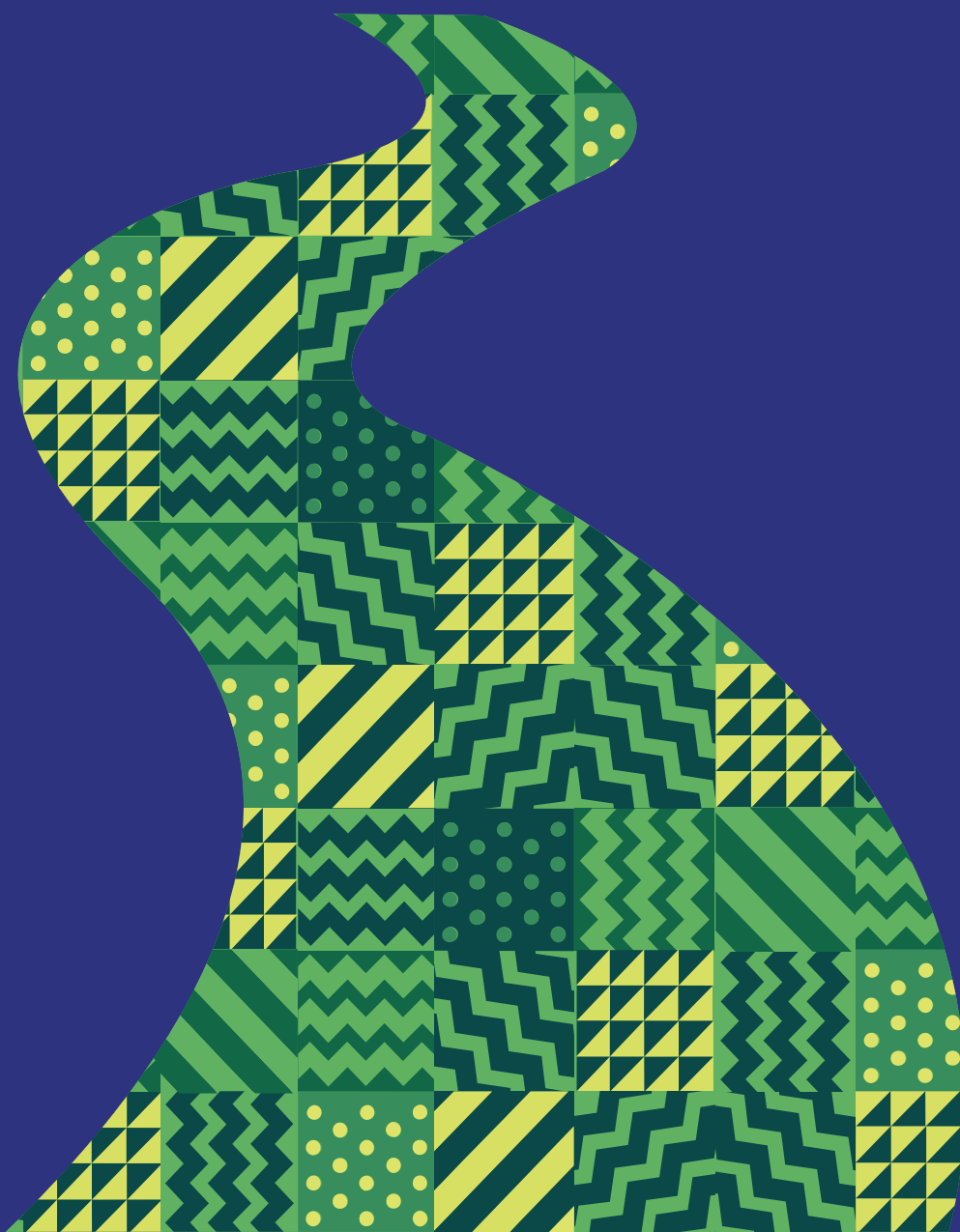


Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

MEETING REPORT

Deliberative dialogues | July- September 2025

**PATHWAYS TOWARDS
A JUST TRANSITION
IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS**



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Introduction

From July to September 2025, FAO convened four online deliberative dialogue meetings on the subject of how to achieve a just transition in agrifood systems. These dialogues brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to define the meaning, identify the key elements, and sketch out the critical policy and financial pathways needed to achieve a just transition in agrifood systems. Participants joined from across the globe, representing farmer and youth groups, national and international civil society organizations, and governments from both the Global South and Global North.

Through interactive breakout groups and plenary discussions, these dialogues surfaced varied insights, grounded in participants' diverse perspectives and unique experiences. Some of these contributions reinforced widely agreed priorities, such as ensuring equitable access to climate finance, promoting social inclusion and locally led approaches, and strengthening social protection mechanisms to support the resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable family farmers, small-scale producers, and Indigenous Peoples. Others introduced less common ideas, such as the potential of fermentation technologies to support food security in climate-affected communities, the importance of soil microbes for climate-resilient agricultural production and carbon sequestration, and the need for democratized data sharing.

The insights generated by these discussions reveal an evolving but shared understanding of what a just transition means in the context of agrifood systems and has identified policy instruments and financial mechanisms that could help advance this vision. Participants identified some of the key elements of a just transition in agrifood systems, including core guiding principles, priority actors and

stakeholders, as well as some of the risks and challenges to be addressed to ensure that net-zero transitions are inclusive and equitable. They also suggested ways for governments to link climate, agricultural, and social development policies, strengthen governance measures to support more inclusive decision-making; and mobilize appropriate and effective financing to support a just transition in agrifood systems.

This report summarizes the key conclusions that emerged from these dialogues. These findings will be of interest to policymakers and practitioners concerned either with developing and directing policies and programmes for achieving a just transition to low-carbon economies and societies, or with those who seek to deliver resilient and inclusive agrifood system transformations that aim to eradicate hunger and poverty, and build sustainable livelihoods for rural people in the context of a rapidly changing climate.

Defining just transition in agrifood systems

Through the dialogues, participants developed a more clearly articulated, though still evolving, definition of what a just transition means for agrifood systems. This definition reflects the numerous complexities, actors, and challenges that are unique to agriculture and other forms of food production across different scales and regions. Insights from participants coalesced around a shared conceptualization of a just transition in agrifood systems as a transformational shift from the inequitable and unsustainable models of production, distribution and consumption that characterize today's global agrifood systems, to ones that are ecologically grounded,



rights-based, and socially inclusive—shaped by the distinctive needs, priorities, and participation of the most vulnerable actors—especially those who have been historically marginalized in the Global South.

This vision of a just transition for agrifood systems is distinct in that it is founded on the recognition that food is a fundamental human right that should be universally guaranteed, especially in the context of climatic changes caused primarily by people living in the Global North. It supports principles, processes and practices aimed at ensuring that all people and communities whose livelihoods and food security depend on agriculture, livestock and fisheries, and on Indigenous food and knowledge systems, are actively included, supported, and empowered to lead in the transition. In particular, it recognizes that a just transition in agrifood systems must prioritize the voices of those most affected by, or vulnerable to climate change, economic exclusion, land dispossession, and systemic inequalities. Dialogue participants also highlighted the unique characteristics of agrifood systems that must be integrated into the definition of just transitions in this context, including:

Food security and nutrition as a human right. Access to adequate and nutritious food is a universal and non-negotiable human right. Just transitions in agrifood systems must therefore ensure that no individual is left hungry or malnourished because of the effects of climate change or of any action taken to mitigate or adapt to climate change. Agrifood systems are currently characterized by rising levels of hunger and malnutrition, especially in rural areas of the Global South. Just transitions in agrifood systems must address and overcome these challenges as a central priority.

Resilient livelihoods and the right to an adequate standard of living. All people also have a universal right to an adequate standard of living, which is founded upon the ability to maintain livelihoods that are sustainable and resilient to shocks and stress. Just transitions in agrifood systems must also ensure that people who work in and rely upon agriculture or Indigenous food and knowledge systems to secure their livelihoods are able to maintain an adequate standard of living, despite the effects of climate change or the efforts of governments or other actors to implement climate action.

Diversity and informality of vulnerable actors. In considering whose needs should be prioritized in a just transition in agrifood systems, participants identified the diverse range of vulnerable actors who exist at the intersection of systemic marginality and informality in agrifood systems (see Figure 1). These actors are essential to the healthy functioning and resilience of agrifood systems, yet they often lack access to information, resources, social protection, and decision-making power. The dialogues emphasized that family farmers, small-scale producers and agricultural labourers constitute a significant portion of the agrifood workforce, but they typically operate informally—without contracts, legal protections, social protection, or representation by formalized trade unions. As a result, their labour rights remain unrecognized, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Crosscutting factors like gender, disability and migration status compound the marginalization of these actors and communities, highlighting the need for intersectional, targeted, decentralized, and participatory approaches to just transition planning that take the needs and rights of all workers into account.



The deep interdependence of agrifood systems with natural ecosystems.

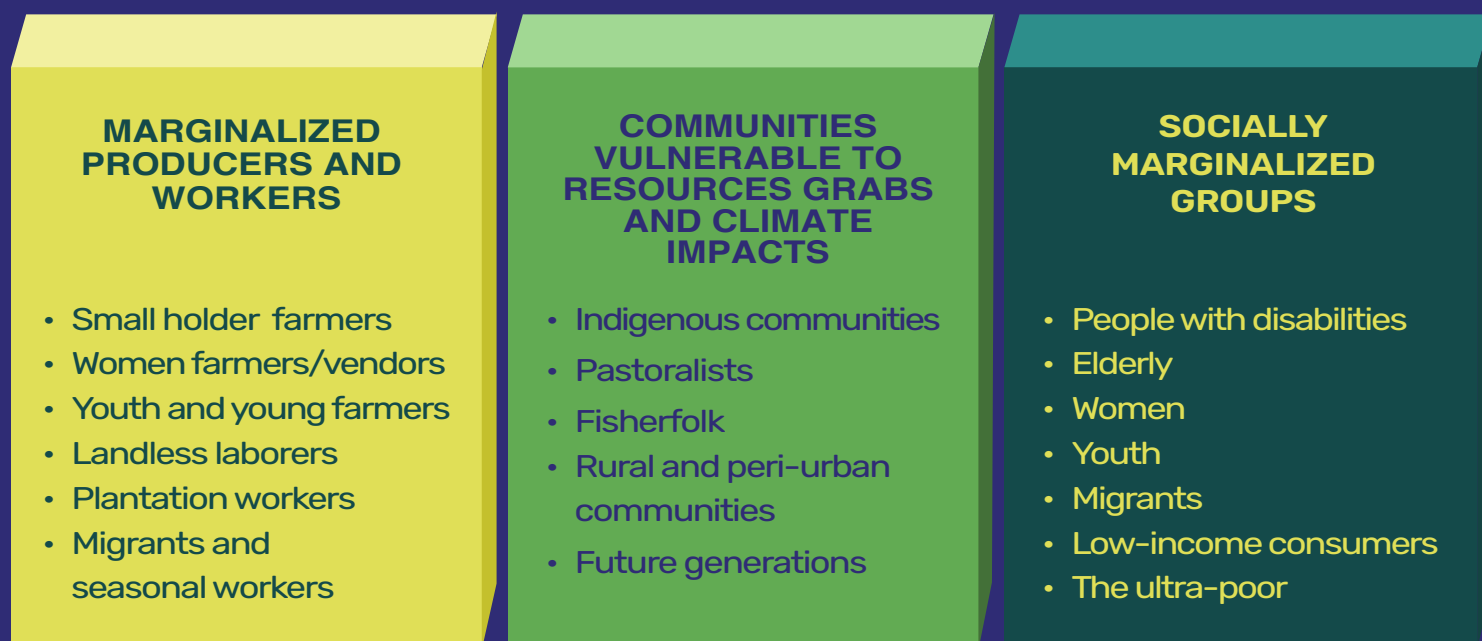
Dialogue participants stressed that agrifood systems are heavily dependent on natural resources, including land, water, and biodiversity for their viability. However, natural ecosystems are under strain due to climate change and agricultural policies and practices. As such, agrifood systems—with their deeply interlinked actors, communities, and value chains—are extremely vulnerable to climate instabilities, and ecological disruptions. A just transition for agrifood systems must therefore be designed to reflect and respond to the interdependencies that exist between natural and agrifood systems. It must attend to the direct implications that the transition will have on ecosystem health, ensuring that actions to address climate change deliver positive benefits not only for people and the climate, but also for nature.

Core elements of a just transition in agrifood systems

The dialogues identified several elements that were considered critical for a just transition in agrifood systems. Among these, the following were particularly important for participants:

Agroecology. Agroecology emerged repeatedly as a critical means for advancing a just transition in agrifood systems. Described as a holistic and scalable approach that can enhance soil health, biodiversity, livelihoods, and community resilience, agroecology was described as a promising method for strengthening food sovereignty, reducing vulnerability, and supporting carbon sequestration. Participants also suggested that agroecology explicitly integrates the goals of climate mitigation and adaptation

Figure 1. Vulnerable groups in agrifood systems





with the principles of social justice and the preservation of local and traditional knowledge. The Landless People's Movement in Brazil and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)'s My Food is African campaign stood out as compelling examples of movements that have successfully drawn on agroecology to strengthen and reclaim local food systems in ways that can enhance the livelihoods and food security of rural communities and households.


Local and Indigenous knowledge. Central to these discussions was the importance of protecting and elevating local and Indigenous knowledge for a just transition in agrifood systems. Dialogue participants stressed that cultural agroecosystems and traditional knowledge systems can be harnessed to build climate resilience, but that they are under increasing threat of erasure due to agricultural modernization, land conversion, labour migration, and climate change. In response, the dialogues called for the democratization of knowledge to ensure that research, data, and innovations are readily accessible to small-scale producers and other marginalized groups such as pastoralists and Indigenous Peoples. They also urged the meaningful integration of local and traditional forms of knowledge into formal decision-making processes in agrifood systems. This requires more decentralized capacity building, as well as establishing systems to facilitate more equitable collaboration between government institutions and commercial firms with local producers and land stewards, in knowledge generation, policy making and planning.

Locally-led, context-based, and inclusive. The dialogues highlighted the need for just transitions in agrifood systems to be context-specific, which requires them to be tailored to the specific characteristics of agroecological

zones and regional biodiversity, and responsive to the local realities and needs of vulnerable peoples and communities. For this to occur, participants suggested that the planning and implementation of just transition efforts should be grounded in local governance structures and grassroots initiatives, such as community groups, cooperatives and farmer organizations, which can empower subnational actors, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples, to design and manage agrifood system transition plans on their own terms.

However, most vulnerable groups that work in and rely upon the agriculture and food production for their livelihoods—such as women, youth, persons with disabilities and landless farmers—are not well represented by trade unions, are often unable to participate in decision-making processes, and lack formal protections, making them highly vulnerable to exploitation, exclusion, and land dispossession. Participatory processes and collective action were therefore identified as essential tools for ensuring social inclusion and empowerment, supporting marginalized people and groups to engage actively in the co-creation of policies and plans that affect their lives and livelihoods.

Rights-based approaches. Recognizing that access to adequate and nutritious food, and to an adequate standard of living, are fundamental human rights, dialogue participants agreed that a just transition in agrifood systems must be firmly grounded in human rights principles. Given that family farmers, small-scale producers, and Indigenous Peoples are among the hungriest, poorest, and most vulnerable people in the world, despite producing a large proportion of the world's food supply, participants agreed that the rights to food and to an adequate standard of living must be central to all



efforts to achieve a just transition in agrifood systems.

The dialogues called for the integration of rights-based safeguards and binding instruments to protect marginalized people from the negative effects of both climate change and climate action, which may threaten their livelihoods and food security.

Human rights instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the principle of Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) were highlighted as foundational tools for pursuing a just transition in agrifood systems, as they can ensure that communities affected by climate change and climate action are not only protected from harm, but are also involved actively in the transition planning and implementation processes.

Market access, economic equity, and responsibilities of the Global North. Gaps in access to markets, finance, and training were identified as critical barriers that prevent family farmers, small-scale producers and other marginalized actors within agrifood systems from benefiting from opportunities such as transition finance, carbon credits, sustainable farming practices, and agricultural innovations and technology.

Acknowledging that most subsidies in agriculture go to industrial agrifood production that is harmful to biodiversity and a major emitter of greenhouse gases, participants called for a strategic reallocation of financial subsidies towards agroecology, smallholder farming and other forms of climate- and nature-positive agriculture that can support

food sovereignty, social justice, and ecological regeneration.

The dialogues also highlighted the need for countries in the Global North and large agribusinesses to acknowledge their historical responsibilities for climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and to deliver their fair share of GHG emissions reductions, climate finance for just transitions in agrifood systems, and the equitable transfer of technology and knowledge to the most climate-vulnerable populations of the Global South.

Policy directions for a just transition in agrifood systems

The dialogues noted that structural barriers exist which impede the effective delivery of a just transition in agrifood systems. Some of these barriers are related to current climate change-related decision-making processes, which remain highly centralized and are often characterized by limited participation of affected, vulnerable, or marginalized groups. Participants noted that key national climate frameworks—such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDS)—are often designed without meaningful input from local stakeholders, resulting in interventions that do not match the realities and needs of diverse contexts.

Another major concern was the misalignment between national climate policies and broader agricultural and social-development strategies, which can undermine efforts towards a holistic and equitable transformation of agrifood systems. Dialogue discussions around such barriers produced a variety of suggested policy directions, aimed at strengthening governance and



improving the quality of high-level decisions for a just transition in agrifood systems. Key suggestions included:

Multisectoral coordination and evidence-based policymaking. Echoing the “whole-of-economy” and “whole-of-government” approaches that have been explored in the dialogues of the UNFCCC’s Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), participants highlighted the need for institutional mechanisms that can improve the harmonization of national policymaking and resource allocation across the climate change, agriculture, and social development sectors. They suggested that this could be achieved through the establishment of national and subnational just transition platforms or committees tasked with identifying and coordinating the use of policies, strategies, instruments, and resources to advance a just transition in agrifood systems transformations. Such platforms or committees could include representatives from relevant ministries, non-governmental organizations, and communities, with similar structures replicated at the local level to ensure sustained, multi-level institutional coordination on just transition policy making and implementation.

Case studies were also identified as community engagement tools that can help governments to more effectively translate just transition principles into integrated policies, action plans, and financial instruments meeting local needs and priorities. Evidence from such case studies can also help to promote existing farmer-led initiatives, including agroecological practices that enhance community resilience and food sovereignty.

Inclusive vertical platforms supported by locally-grounded leadership. The dialogues identified the need to establish platforms

and spaces that enable the participation of local communities and marginalized groups, including Indigenous peoples, in national and international decision-making processes, and to improve vertical communication and feedback on implementation-level issues.

The proposed Belém Action Mechanism (BAM) was suggested as one option that could be used to enhance multi-level policy dialogue under the UNFCCC’s Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), and to support countries in developing and implementing concrete just transition action plans. The BAM was proposed as an inclusive yet formal space for knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and strategic alignment between grassroots initiatives, national policies, and global climate frameworks, as well as an opportunity to elevate agrifood systems within high-level climate discussions, and to channel finance towards relevant initiatives.

Participants further emphasized the importance of establishing dedicated funds and accessibility mechanisms to ensure inclusive and meaningful representation of marginalised people and local communities—particularly women and youth—within global policymaking spaces. The dialogues also underscored the need for strengthening the capacities of local leaders, such as civil society organizations, district officers, and agricultural extension officers, so that are empowered to manage climate budgets, disseminate appropriate technical knowledge, support the implementation of mitigation and adaptation projects, and coordinate the communication of feedback between communities and provincial or national-level policymakers.

Policies addressing key risks of poor and marginalized communities. Dialogue discussions consistently pointed to the need



for national policies that safeguard the rights of poor and marginalized producers and communities against the risks associated with climate change and the actions taken to address its impacts. In addition to operationalizing existing human rights declarations (e.g., ICESCR, UNDRIP, UNDROP, FPIC), the dialogues called for national climate and agriculture policies to include social protection mechanisms, such as insurance, loss and damage assistance, and school feeding programmes—measures that can protect farmers from ongoing climate shocks, while also incentivizing them to adopt and experiment with new practices.

Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme and India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) were highlighted as concrete examples of how social protection programmes can be designed to strengthen local resilience and create equitable livelihood opportunities in rural communities.

The dialogues also underscored the need for strengthened policy and legal frameworks that can ensure equitable land access and tenure security for small-scale producers and rural communities—particularly women and Indigenous Peoples—while also safeguarding these communities from extractive land-use practices.

Financing a just transition in agrifood systems

The question of how to finance a just transition in agrifood systems emerged as a repeated concern throughout the dialogues. This relates both to the need for finance providers to allocate adequate amounts of finance for a just transition in agrifood

systems, and to ensure that just transition finance is appropriate to the needs of affected countries and communities, reaching the people and places that need it the most, through disbursement channels that are aligned with their needs and capabilities. The dialogues identified several financial resources and delivery mechanisms that would be appropriate for enabling a just transition in agrifood systems in low and middle-income countries:

Harnessing public finance. Public domestic resources must be channeled away from industrial, export-driven agricultural and land management practices that produce greenhouse gases, degrade ecosystems, engage in land clearing, and which exploit or exclude marginalized and vulnerable groups. This would free up billions of dollars in public finance which can be invested into a just transition by supporting locally-led, inclusive and climate resilient agrifood systems transformation. Cautioning that blended finance can sometimes divert resources away from the communities where they are most needed, participants suggested that public funds should be used to support small-scale producers across the Global South who are already spending billions of dollars each year from their own pockets to finance their own adaptation to climate change.

Debt forgiveness. Recent years have seen a growth in the proportion of climate finance that is being provided to developing countries as loans rather than grants, and many countries are now increasingly constrained by high debt burdens. Debt repayment obligations limit the fiscal space available to such countries, reducing their ability to invest in climate action, provide essential public services to vulnerable communities, and contribute to resilient, inclusive agrifood



systems transformation. In some cases, governments have been forced to expand extractive and polluting industry development to repay their debts. Debt cancellation was proposed as a high-level solution to free up public resources for equitable climate investments that can support a just transition in agrifood systems.

Funding the “missing middle”. Noting that climate finance is currently channeled through large funds to governments and bigger institutions, or through microfinance aimed at small grassroots projects, the dialogues highlighted the importance of increasing mid-sized funding windows between USD 300,000 and 1.5 million. These resources are critical for micro-, small-, and medium-sized rural enterprises that could drive agrifood system transformation at the local level, but they are not readily available.

Enhancing access to small-scale producers. Expanding community access windows within global and domestic climate funds can improve small-scale producers’ ability to adopt climate adaptive practices, engage in climate change mitigation, and build agrifood systems resilience. Participants suggested that strengthening financial literacy and supporting locally rooted financing mechanisms—such as village savings groups, solidarity funds, and cooperatives—would further ensure access to flexible, affordable, and context-appropriate finance that could help to deliver a just transition in agrifood systems.

Towards COP30 and beyond

These deliberative dialogues have been instrumental in advancing a clearer definition of what a just transition for agrifood systems might entail, and in identifying possible policy directions and financial mechanisms that can enable the delivery of resilient and inclusive agrifood systems transformation in low- and middle-income countries.

At COP30, Parties to the UNFCCC have an opportunity to integrate agrifood systems into the just transition agenda for the first time. By following the lead set by the COP30 Presidency, Parties can link just transition with the transformation of agriculture and food systems in COP negotiations and in a decision text. This would catalyze concrete action and financial resources to advance a just transition in agrifood systems.

These deliberative dialogues identified foundational principles and key elements that can inform the policy pathways and practical actions that are needed to implement a resilient and inclusive transformation of agrifood systems at the global, regional, and national levels. These sessions also helped to establish an emerging community of practice that can continue to refine the vision and strategies for advancing a just transition in agrifood systems in both global policymaking spaces as well as on the ground with local communities.

Achieving a just transition in agrifood systems will require coordinated action, inclusive governance and targeted finance. The dialogues have charted a path forward, one that hopefully brings together all the actors to transform agrifood systems so that they can deliver food security, justice and sustainability for all.

