**What are the barriers and opportunities for scientists and other knowledge holders to contribute to informing policy for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems?**

  
Recognizing the importance and urgency of leveraging the potential of science and innovation to overcome the intertwined social, economic and environmental challenges of agrifood systems in a globally equitable, inclusive and sustainable manner, FAO’s first-ever [Science and Innovation Strategy](https://www.fao.org/3/cc2273en/cc2273en.pdf) (the Strategy) was designed through an inclusive, transparent and consultative process. It is a key tool to support the delivery of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and hence the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Strategy states that FAO’s technical work and normative guidance will be based on the most credible, relevant and legitimate evidence available and that evidence will be assessed in a rigorous, transparent and neutral manner. The Strategy is grounded in seven **guiding principles,** and its three mutually re-enforcing **pillars**, which define its main priorities and group together its nine outcomes, are: 1) Strengthening science and evidence-based decision-making; 2) Supporting innovation and technology at regional and country level; and, 3) Serving Members better by reinforcing FAO’s capacities. Two **enablers** are mainstreamed throughout the three pillars: transformative partnerships and innovative funding and financing.

Decades of development efforts around the world have shown that narrow approaches and technological quick-fixes do not work, especially in the long-term. Science and innovation can be a powerful engine to transform agrifood systems and end hunger and malnutrition, but only when they are accompanied by the right enabling environment. These include strong institutions, good governance, political will, enabling regulatory frameworks, and effective measures to promote equity among agrifood system actors. To respond to this, the Strategy emphasizes the need to ground actions on science and innovation in the guiding principles: rights-based and people-centered; gender-equal; evidence-based; needs-driven; sustainability-aligned; risk-informed; and ethics-based.

Another lesson, integrated into the scope of the Strategy, is that single disciplines on their own are not able to address systemic challenges in a holistic manner, leading to a growing appreciation of the need for supporting sustainability science, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. While science is fundamentally important, the Strategy also recognizes the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and small-scale producers as an important source of innovation for agrifood systems.

**RATIONALE FOR THIS CONSULTATION**

Science and evidence are essential for sound decision-making, but do not necessarily provide a singular course of action. Scientific findings may be limited by insufficient data, uncertainties, contrasting results, and can be contested. Decision-making is often influenced by a variety of both structural and behavioral drivers and barriers as well as numerous stakeholders with diverse values and with significant power asymmetries.

One of the nine outcomes of the Strategy (Outcome 2 under Pillar 1) focusses on strengthening science-policy interfaces[[1]](#footnote-1) for agrifood systems. The Strategy indicates that FAO will strengthen its contribution to science-policy interfaces (SPIs) at national, regional and global levels to support organized dialogue between scientists, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders in support of inclusive science-based policy making for greater policy coherence, shared ownership and collective action. The added value of FAO’s contribution is to focus at national and regional levels in addition to the global level, to address issues that are relevant to agrifood systems taking into account as appropriate information and analyses produced by existing SPIs, such as the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and to enable ongoing and effective dialogue through the institutional architecture provided by the FAO Governing Bodies.

Integration of science and evidence into effective agrifood system decision-making processes remains a significant challenge. For example, and for a variety of reasons, policymakers may not inform scientists and other knowledge holders about their needs while scientists and other knowledge holders may not actively engage in the policy-making process. Additionally, many obstacles may compromise this participation.

It is against this background that this online consultation is being organized by the FAO Chief Scientist Office to further identify and understand the barriers and opportunities for scientists and other knowledge holders (drawing their knowledge from other knowledge systems, including Indigenous Peoples, small-scale producers, etc.) to contribute to informing policy for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

**QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THIS CONSULTATION**

We invite participants to address some or all of the following discussion questions (as relevant to their experience) and provide examples as appropriate.

1. **Analysis of the complexities and practical problems associated with science-policy interfaces:**

* Do you have an understanding of how agrifood systems policy is enacted in your country or at the regional or international levels?
* Are you aware of opportunities to contribute science, evidence and knowledge to policy at national, regional or global levels?
* What kind of knowledge and evidence is privileged in such processes?
* What are the strengths and weaknesses of the processes you are aware of?
* What opportunities and challenges have you faced for drawing from sustainability science, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity to inform policy?
* How can power asymmetries among stakeholders be taken effectively into account in science-policy processes?

1. **Knowledge production for policy**

* What actions do you take to align your research to problems and challenges faced by agrifood systems?
* In what ways are the research questions in your sphere of work framed by academic interests and/or funders’ focus?
* To what extent do you feel research and policy-making communities in your sphere of work are united in their understanding of the challenges facing agrifood systems?
* To what extent do you work across disciplines and/or draw on expertise from academic and non-academic actors including Indigenous Peoples and small-scale producers?
* To what extent, and in what ways, is your research co-produced with other knowledge holders and non-academic-stakeholders important for informing policy in agrifood systems?

1. **Knowledge translation for policy-making**

* To what extent does your organization/university support you to produce and disseminate knowledge products to a range of audiences?
* How does it create/maintain institutional linkages between producers and users of research? Describe any dedicated resources for knowledge translation that are in place.
* Please describe any incentives or rewards in place for effective, sustained policy engagement, for example successfully conducting policy-relevant research and for its dissemination.
* Please tell us about any activities that you or your organization / university engage in to collate evidence for policy, such as evidence synthesis activities, or guideline development.
* Do you or your organization / university engage in processes to build evidence into agrifood policy processes such as government consultations, government knowledge management systems, digital decision-support systems, web portals, etc.? Please tell us more.
* Do you or your organization / university contribute to efforts to ensure that evidence is provided for policy making which is grounded in an understanding of a national (or sub-national) contexts (including time constraints), demand-driven, and focused on contextualizing the evidence for a given decision in an equitable way? If so, please tell us more.

1. **Assessing evidence**

* What makes evidence credible, relevant and legitimate to different audiences, and how might we balance their different requirements?
* How can evidence be assessed in a rigorous, transparent and neutral manner?
* How can assessments of evidence best be communicated to all stakeholders’?

1. **Examples -** Please share any examples of how the science, evidence and knowledge generated through your work or the work of your organization / university has subsequently fed into decision-making.

Comments are welcome in all six UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese).

Your contributions to the online consultation will be compiled and analyzed by the FAO Chief Scientist Office. The results will inform work on the development of guidance for strengthening science-policy interfaces as well as science- and evidence-based policy processes for agrifood systems, helping to ensure that effective policy decisions are made based upon sufficient, relevant and credible science and evidence. Proceedings of the contributions received will be made publicly available on this consultation webpage.

We look forward to receiving your valuable input and to learning from your experiences.

*Dr Preet Lidder, Technical Adviser in the Chief Scientist Office, FAO*

*Dr Eric Welch, Professor, Arizona State University*

1. The Strategy defines the term ‘Science-Policy Interface’ as mechanisms for organized dialogue between scientists, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders in support of inclusive science-based policy-making. Effective science-policy interfaces are characterized by relevance, legitimacy, transparency, inclusivity, and ongoing and effective dialogue through an appropriate institutional architecture. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)