CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:
How can the hidden costs and benefits of agrifood systems be effectively incorporated into decision-making for transformation?

Agrifood systems provide vital benefits to society, not least because they produce the food that nourishes us, provide jobs to over a billion people and shape cultural identities. Nevertheless, they also contribute to climate change, natural resource degradation, and biodiversity loss, while failing to ensure access to a healthy and affordable diet for everyone. The complexity and interdependencies of agrifood systems make it challenging for decision-makers to incorporate the costs and benefits they generate into decision making.

The 2023 edition of FAO’s flagship publication “The State of Food and Agriculture 2023” (SOFA 2023) has the theme “Revealing the true cost of food to transform agrifood systems”. By introducing the concept of the hidden costs and benefits of agrifood systems and providing a framework through which these can be assessed, this report aims to initiate a process that will better prepare decisions-makers for actions to steer agrifood systems towards environmental, social and economic sustainability. The report presents the results of national-level true cost accounting (TCA) assessments for 154 countries, and estimates that the global quantified hidden costs of agrifood systems amount to 10 trillion 2020 PPP dollars in 2020 or more (approximately 10 percent of global GDP). This underlines the urgent need to factor these costs into decision-making to promote agrifood systems transformation towards sustainability.

The SOFA 2023 report also affirms that, while the global estimates of the hidden costs quantified in the report are useful to raise awareness on the magnitude of the challenge, more research and evidence are needed for the design and the implementation of concrete actions
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and investments to address the hidden costs and enhance the benefits of agrifood systems. This should be done through targeted assessments based on TCA, which take into account the local contexts to refine the national estimates and consider the costs of different paths of transformation.

Given the relevance of this topic, for the first time since the launch of the SOFA publication in 1947, FAO is dedicating two consecutive issues to the same theme. **The SOFA 2024 will showcase the flexibility of TCA in its application to different scopes, from an entire agrifood system down to a single product.** Through a wide range of case studies, it will demonstrate the importance and challenges of incorporating the hidden costs into decision-making to evaluate different policy and management options to transform agrifood systems for the better. Its ultimate goal is to better prepare decisions-makers for actions to steer agrifood systems towards environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The SOFA team invites stakeholders to share illustrative examples (case studies) of existing or ongoing assessments of hidden costs and benefits of agrifood systems to ensure a wide range of coverage around the globe and across sectors. We also encourage contributions that elaborate on how such assessments have been used to inform decision-makers and other stakeholders in implementing transformative actions towards sustainable agrifood systems.

Contributions can include (but are not limited to) validation of the preliminary assessment of hidden costs presented in SOFA 2023, assessments of how the TCA approach can be tailored to the priorities of policymakers in different contexts and identification of areas for further analysis. Recognizing the complexity of covering all hidden cost dimensions, this call for submissions also targets contributions/case studies that look at two or more aspects of the hidden costs under environmental, social or health categories. These can include hidden cost sources such as water scarcity, greenhouse gas emissions, health consequences of unhealthy dietary patterns, or social consequences (including poverty and undernourishment) in a specific location of a country/region.

The final aim is to collect relevant inputs, key messages, and country level case studies to contribute to the writing process of SOFA 2024 (to be published in November 2024). The SOFA team will review and select pertinent case studies to feature in the report considering the relevance and contributions to diversity (geographic, sectoral and methodological) of each case.

**The call is open until 15 January 2024.**

How to take part in this call for submissions

To take part in this Call for submissions, please register to the FSN Forum, if you are not yet a member, or “sign in” to your account. Please download the submission template in any of six UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese) and upload the completed form in the box "Post your contribution" on this webpage. Please keep the length of submissions limited to 2,000 words and feel also free to attach relevant supporting materials. For any technical support, downloading or uploading the submission template, please send an email to fsn-moderator@fao.org.
We look forward to receiving your valuable contributions, which will undoubtedly enhance the content of SOFA 2024.

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