Special Meeting of ECOSOC on
Agrifood systems transformations for leaving no one behind
16 February 2026 - 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm - ECOSOC Chamber

Concept note

Background

Successful agrifood system transformations can act as a major lever for broad-based, inclusive and job-rich economic growth, fueling sustainability, stability, food security and poverty reduction. Sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns were identified as one of six transformative entry points in the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report,[i] underscoring its central role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, persistent challenges including the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, economic shocks, food price inflation and geopolitical circumstances threaten the resilience of agrifood systems.

***Global hunger remains too high*.** Despite a slight decrease – from 8.5 percent in 2023 to 8.2 percent in 2024, about 673 million people – in overall global hunger, progress across countries and regions has been unequal and insufficient to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.[ii] Meanwhile, acute food insecurity continues to worsen. In 2024, almost 300 million people across 53 countries faced high levels of acute food insecurity, with 35 of these countries experiencing food crises every year for the past decade.[iii] According to a recent joint report by FAO and WFP, acute food insecurity may deepen in 16 hunger hotspots over the period of November 2025 to May 2026. [iv]

Unequal participation in and remuneration from agrifood systems is constraining engagement. A lack of access to services, land, and credit, amongst others, are common constraints faced by those engaged in agrifood systems, in particular women and youth. Youth engagement in agrifood systems has steadily declined from 54 percent in 2005 to 44 percent in 2021.[v]

And, while global agricultural investment reached a record high, the sector remains underfunded.[vi] Many countries have significant fiscal constraints and face high debt burdens, limiting their ability to invest in agrifood systems at the scale needed.[vii] This is only exacerbated by declining levels of international financial support. In 2024, ODA fell by 9 percent in net terms and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projected an additional 9-17 percent decline in 2025. [viii] Forecasts suggest the funding shortfall to develop more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems would require approximately 680 million dollars per annum.[ix]

Collective, coordinated and comprehensive efforts to transform agrifood systems are needed to change course. Repurposed agricultural policies and increased investments are key to modernizing and enhancing productivity, resilience and sustainability of agrifood systems. Together,

these can create gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities including for young people in the agriculture sector, providing an enabling environment for agribusiness to thrive.

These efforts should be bolstered by a suite of tools underpinned by robust data and analysis, technology, as well as solid metrics to determine progress. Strategic investments are needed to build digital infrastructure and literacy, which are prerequisites for technology adoption, while effective policies and proactive governance must help ensure these tools are accessible and equitable.

Moreover, it is essential to place a special emphasis on the most vulnerable countries such as LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS, fragile states and net food-importing developing countries - where fiscal space is limited and food insecurity is the most acute.

Objective

The meeting will aim to catalyze coordinated and coherent action in support of agrifood system transformations, building on the momentum, insights and commitments from recent meetings, conferences and summits, including the 2025 High-level political forum on Sustainable Development, the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake+4 (UNFSS+4), the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), the 53rd session of the Committee on World Food Security, the Third UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries, and the Second World Summit for Social Development.

Two interactive panel discussions will focus on the following key topics:

- Scaling up finance to transform agrifood systems: accelerating opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.
- Exploring how innovation—including digital solutions and emerging technologies—can advance more inclusive agrifood systems.

Outcome

Governments, international organizations and other stakeholders engaged in agrifood systems will be convened to engage in dynamic discussions that identify key policy actions to achieve tangible results.

The outcome of the discussions will be a **call to action**, which will feed into other milestones throughout the ECOSOC cycle, including the ECOSOC Youth Forum (14-16 April 2026), the Multistakeholder forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (6-7 May 2026), and the High-Level Political Forum (6-15 July 2026).

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Draft Programme

3:00 – 3:15 p.m. Welcome and setting the stage

3:15 – 4:30 p.m. Panel 1: Scaling up finance to transform agrifood systems: accelerating opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship

Guiding questions:

- How can public and private investment be aligned to drive transformation of agrifood systems while ensuring inclusive job creation?
- How can governments and financial institutions de-risk investments in sustainable agrifood systems, especially for small and medium agribusinesses to drive rural employment?
- What are the most critical global or regional shifts needed to mobilize financing at scale for climate-resilient, productive, and equitable agrifood systems?

Interactive discussion

4:30 – 5:45 p.m. Panel 2: Exploring how innovation—including digital solutions and emerging technologies—can advance more inclusive agrifood systems

Guiding questions:

- In your context, what innovative approaches and digital technologies have the greatest potential to accelerate food systems transformation? *(This invites country-specific or sector-specific examples.)*
- What risks or unintended consequences could emerge from these approaches, and what strategies can help mitigate them? *(Focus on governance, ethics, and sustainability.)*
- How can innovation and technology be better deployed to ensure they are inclusive and accessible to the most vulnerable populations? *(Address design principles, affordability, and equity.)*
- How do we build the digital skills and literacy of farmers, especially women and youth, to ensure they are not just users but beneficiaries and shapers of technology?

Interactive discussion

5:45 – 6:00 p.m. Closing

[i] United Nations, Independent Group of Scientists. 2023. Global Sustainable Development Report: *Times of Crisis, Times of Change - Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development*. https://sdgs.un.org/gsdr/gsdr2023

[ii] FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2025. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 – Addressing high food price inflation for food security and nutrition*. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd6008en

[iii] FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2025. *Global Report on Food Crises 2025*. Rome. GRFC2025-full.pdf

[iv] FAO and WFP.2025. *Hunger Hotspots:FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity*: November 2025 to May 2026 outlook.Rome.

[v] FAO. 2025. "The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems" (https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5886en)

[vi] FAO. 2025. *Government expenditures in agriculture 2001–2023 – Global and regional trends.* FAOSTAT Analytical Briefs, No. 100. Rome.

[vii] unfss4_en_sg_report.pdf (p.4)

[viii] (p.4)

[ix] Laborde, D., Torero, M. (2023). Modeling Actions for Transforming Agrifood Systems. In: von Braun, J., Afsana, K., Fresco, L.O., Hassan, M.H.A. (eds) Science and Innovations for Food Systems Transformation. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15703-5_7