



Funded by
the European Union

Global Mirror Group Notes

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About FoodPaths

FOODPathS is a project funded by the European Commission under the coordination of INRAE and in collaboration with 17 organizations and their networks. The project aims to prepare the ground for the FutureFoodS Partnership. Together, these very different actors are trying to:

Vertical

TF1 – Change the way (what) we eat

TF2 – Change the way we process and supply

TF3 – Change the way we connect (act) citizens and food production

TF4 – Change the way we govern the food systems

Horizontal

TF5 – Co-funding and Programming

TF6 – FS observatory, data, methods

TF7 – FS knowledge hub of FS Labs

TF8 – Knowledge sharing and scaling

https://scar-europe.org/Images/FOOD/Main_actions/Food-Systems-Partnership_Narrative-06-2021.pdf

https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/european-partnership-safe-and-sustainable-food-system-people-planet-climate_en

This Partnership (with an estimated co-funding by the European Commission of ~175 Mio Euro) will play a crucial role in reaching the sustainability ambitions stated in the Farm-to-Fork Strategy and the Green Deal. It is foreseen to unite many different actors to jointly make the transition towards SFS a success.

More concretely, FOODPathS is building a prototype of how an ideal and effective Partnership on sustainability of the food systems should look like, including the co-design of a Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda – SRIA (which will inspire future calls for funding and innovative projects), funding strategies, a governance model, modus operandi, research-innovation-policy-education topics and case studies, locally and globally.

Mirror Groups

The Mirror Group meetings are a response to recognizing that there are European and Global voices missing from the FOODPathS consortium. Mirror group participants are people who set the tone, guide the way, and say stop when things are not moving in the right direction. Since participants, just as food systems stakeholders, come from different organizational backgrounds with different agendas, mirror groups also allow us to find out more about how we can work together, share ideas, which language we use, and how we can agree on a common basis to advance a systems approach to sustainable food system transformation.

The goal of the meetings is to gain feedback about key components of an ideal partnership, especially on:

- **Elements of a Partnerships** (how to make funding cycles inclusive, foster collaborative public-private partnerships, local to global governance, the role of educational networks and universities)
- **Governance** (Decision-making and power distributions) and **Modus Operandi** (how the partnership executes tasks and manages interaction to achieve project outcomes efficiently; communication, including communication and feedback mechanisms)

Participants were organized into small groups and assigned puzzle pieces representing different facets of the partnership with different associated questions. The overarching objective is to integrate these puzzle pieces, thereby fostering cohesion within the partnership framework. Guided discussions facilitated by a moderator and note-taker were conducted to capture key insights:

Session 1: Elements of a Partnership

Funding Cycle

How can the funding cycle be inclusive from call design to proposal writing to projects selected? What support could non-EU organizations benefit from when wanting to acquire EU funding? Do you have examples from best practices that can inspire the work we are doing?

- By implementing a more user-friendly approach to enhance accessibility and efficiency.
- By transitioning from a top-down model to a co-creational process that integrates local and regional levels, addressing the full complexity of the system and fostering collaborative solutions.
- By reducing reporting requirements and emphasizing evaluation, as excessive reporting can burden smaller NGOs.
- By incorporating labels within the funding cycle to ensure that human rights and equity considerations are integrated.
 - A relevant example is the IKI (International Climate Initiative) which has integrated environmental and social standards that projects must meet.
- By securing funding in areas outside the EU and Africa, such as the Philippines and China, which still remains a challenge despite serious food system issues.
- By involving organizations representing regions outside the EU in funding processes. As the EU cannot directly choose who receives funding, there is a feeling that the funding process does not reach the organizations that need it most.
- New Zealand is a new partner of Horizon EU, which is very positive news.

Public-Private Partnerships

What is the appropriate way to engage private and public organizations in the future partnership operating at global, EU, and local scales? Do you have examples from best practices that can inspire the work we are doing?

- Providing funding support to ensure effective participation.
- Involving all sectors from the outset to foster comprehensive engagement.
- Giving municipalities discretionary control over allocated funds.
- Providing smaller companies and lower-level actors who might otherwise struggle to emerge with adequate support to allow them to participate more actively.
- Promoting partnerships between civil society organizations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to foster inclusive development.
- Considering and mitigating potential conflicts of interest that may limit participation in public-private partnerships.
- Addressing inequalities between EU and non-EU countries.

Educational Networks

What is the role of universities at local, national and global levels to support food system transformation in the partnership? How do universities currently engage with the topic of sustainable food systems in your country? Do you have examples of good collaborations that can inspire the work we are doing?

- Engaging institutions which have already worked on or have plans to work on the topic of food systems transformation.
- With the SDGs, many institutions are working into on reducing hunger and improving food sustainability so there is higher level of interest to leverage on.

Inclusive Governance from Local to Global

How can we ensure inclusive governance at different levels in order to reduce trade-offs and facilitate co-benefits?

- By encouraging representatives to engage actively with country offices, fostering stronger collaboration and communication at the local level.
- By exploring diverse forms of communication and the informal mechanisms that exist. How can we enhance these channels?
- By moving beyond traditional donor-partner dynamics, focusing not just on efficiency but meaningful impact and knowledge sharing.
- By shifting focus from numerical metrics alone to monitoring systems that capture deeper insights, integrating participatory approaches, co-designed processes, and indigenous voices.
- By promoting knowledge brokering. What does it truly mean to be at the same table? Can everyone join?
- By strengthening the voice of informal food sector functions through both informative and facilitate co-creation of knowledge.
- By recognizing that much of the interaction in the food sector follows routine practices and, consequently, by understanding the nuances of each context and adapting communication effectively to these specific settings.
- By establishing visible routes, champions and points of contact. Each Member State will have a point of contact within the Partnership, but for non-European countries the need for clear technical support is essential. Insiders know how to navigate, but outsiders are faced with unclear processes.
- By balancing voices and avoiding bias while allowing everyone to speak.
- By ensuring partnerships are supported to so that countries retain their voice while organizations provide additional support.

Session 2: Governance and Modus Operandi

ENVISIONED ACHIEVEMENTS

Thought experiment 2029: What has the partnership has achieved?

- Small partners have been included in the collaboration.
- Multiple demographic entry points are being taken into consideration.
- Dynamic systems have been adopted, which are place-specific and account for complexity. The focus is not solely on scaling up but also on addressing specificities and emerging trends.
- Support for market processes and small businesses has been prioritized.
- Metrics for tracking food waste are being developed and implemented.
- The distinction between communicating with and communicating to has been recognized, highlighting the difference between internal and external communication.
- Identifying with the partnership has been established as a primary goal.
- Understanding the partnership and effectively communicating about it has been prioritized.

COMMUNICATION

What specific tools and methods does the partnership use for communication with organizations and people globally?

- Roles and responsibilities are more equitably balanced.
- Quantitative indicators have been transformed into more readable and digestible formats.
- Sharing stories has proven to be an effective way of disseminating best practices. The impact of sharing success stories is often greater than that of sharing data alone.
- There is a common platform for sharing capable of reaching diverse regions, and including diverse formats (e.g. videos, music).
- Creativity is key as elements like food can offer considerable flexibility.
- Flexibility is essential, considering partners' preferences.
- Flexible communication strategies have been implemented, utilizing all available and emerging tools. Visits to partners have been conducted to identify barriers and ensure that communication channels are adapted to their needs.
- A multi-channel communication strategy has been established, with all partners utilizing their respective communication channels in a synchronized manner. Some partners may have fewer restrictions, allowing for multiple streams and diverse voices to be heard.
- In terms of inclusiveness, we have recognized our responsibility to give as well as receive, reflecting the principle of a joint: “we have achieved this together.” When individuals dedicate an extra 2% of their time to an activity, it indicates greater value placed on it. Emphasis has been placed on inclusive communication within the partnership, ensuring all members actively participate in setting the agenda.
- Social media and dialogue initiatives have been employed to engage and involve the community actively.
- The different audiences are being properly targeted—such as farmers, young people, or researchers—through suitable language and channels.

DECISION-MAKING

What systems and structures support decision-making within the partnership? How are these processes organized and implemented? Who, from a global perspective, should be involved in such systems and structures?

- The funding process has shifted from being result-driven to a more learning-oriented approach.
- There is an increased emphasis on quality over quantity in the evaluation process.
- Context has proven to be a crucial factor in shaping effective strategies and a bottom-up approach has been particularly important in certain regions.
- Clarity and transparency about the legitimacy of funding schemes, including details of those behind the funding, have become essential.
- There is an ongoing need for a common governance system to provide recommendations and guidance.

FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

What mechanisms are in place to collect and integrate feedback from global partners within the partnership?

- Providing space for failure is recognized as an essential part of the funding process.
- We are now capable of dealing with unattended consequences that may arise during the funding cycle process.
- Returning to partners has become essential for reinforcing collaboration and enhancing communication.

Contacts

For more information, please, visit the website www.foodpaths.eu or contact anna.bruen@iclei.org

Stay updated about FOODPathS: follow the project on @SciFoodHealth channels on [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#) using the hashtag #FOODPathS, or join other >2.200 stakeholders that are discussing the food systems sustainability on the [Sustainable Food Systems Network – SFSN!](#)