**Questionnaire on Healthy and Sustainable Food: Reducing the Environmental Impact of the Global Food System on Human Rights**

**Response of Ireland**

**April 2021**

**Question 1: Please provide examples of ways in which the environmental impacts of the global food systems are having adverse impacts on human rights.**

The seminal Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on Climate Change on Land (2019)[[1]](#footnote-1) provides detailed examples and explanations of ways in which Climate Change, and other environmental impacts of the global food system such as biodiversity loss, land degradation, eco-system services decline, are having adverse impacts on human rights. Other UN technical agencies, such as Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP), have produced robust reports and legislative studies on existing realities within the global food system and their impact on human rights such as: FAO’s Right to Water for Food and Agriculture report (2020)[[2]](#footnote-2), and UNEP’s Climate Change and Human Rights report (2015)[[3]](#footnote-3).

**Question 2: How has climate change affected the global food system?**

As explained in Ireland’s international development policy, *A Better World[[4]](#footnote-4)*, the effects of climate change threaten to undermine gains to date in tackling poverty, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Throughout this century, the impact of climate change is projected to slow down economic growth, exacerbate gender inequality, intensify fragility, further erode food security, prolong existing and create new poverty traps.

In relation to food systems in particular, there have been a number of robust and credible reports published by multilateral Institutions (IPCC, FAO, and UNEP) and other reputable international organisations (WRI, CGIAR, IIED) of late systematically documenting the evidence to show how climate change has affected the global food system. The catastrophic impact of climate change disproportionately affects those least prepared to anticipate, respond and adapt. Ireland’s development cooperation effort will focus on efforts to amplify the concerns of those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and to advocate for greater allocations of finance for grassroots adaptation.

**3. To protect a wide range of human rights, what are the specific obligations of States and responsibilities of businesses in terms of preventing, reducing, or eliminating environmental impacts caused by the unsustainable production or consumption of food? How can we shift to food systems that restore and regenerate nature rather than degrading ecosystems, while providing healthy diets for a global population that will exceed nine billion by 2050?**

For the last twenty years, stakeholder-led strategies have been the cornerstone of Government agri-food policy. The Agri-Food Strategy to 2030[[5]](#footnote-5) is the latest strategy (in consultation stage at the time of this questionnaire). The Committee appointed to compile this Strategy agreed to adopt a food systems approach. This involved consideration not only of the issues affecting the sector directly, but also its connection to people (nutrition and well-being) and the environment.

The food system approach (as defined by FAO) signals a significant change in direction and policy, reflecting the very different context expected during the 2020s. It acknowledges the link between policies for food, climate and the environment, and health, and focuses on the role each part of the food chain has in delivering the 2030 vision. Sustainability in its three forms – economic, environmental and social – are at the heart of the Strategy.

**4. Please provide specific examples of constitutional provisions, legislation, institutions, regulations, standards, jurisprudence, policies and programmes that apply a rights-based approach to ensuring healthy and sustainably produced food. Please include, inter alia, any instruments that refer directly to the right to a healthy environment.**

The agri-food sector in Ireland has benefited from an approach to strategic planning involving the development of ten-year stakeholder-led strategies, updated every five years. Since their inception twenty years ago, up to the current Food Wise 2025 (FW2025) Strategy[[6]](#footnote-6), these have provided the sector with a coherent, stakeholder-led vision to underpin its continued development. The FW2025 strategy includes eight overarching sustainability recommendations with over 80 individual environmental actions.

An Environmental Sustainability Committee was established as a sub-group of the High Level Implementation Committee, following a recommendation in Food Wise 2025 and the accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Sustainability Committee identified 26 priority actions within the sustainability chapter. At the end of 2019, approximately 27% of these actions are reported as target achieved; 42% have substantial action undertaken and are ongoing; and 31% of actions have commenced and are progressing.

Approximately 88% of all of the actions in the sustainability chapter are reported as target achieved/substantial action undertaken and ongoing. The remaining actions are all either ongoing or annual actions. Some of the positive environmental actions that have taken place include:

* Pilot Farm Hazardous Waste Collection Scheme;
* Code of Good Practice for Reducing Ammonia Emissions from Agriculture;
* Voluntary Nitrates Derogation Review;
* DAFM Water Network;
* Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP);
* Profiling energy use within the agriculture sector;
* Establishment of an Inventory Refinement Group: to ensure standardisation and use of common data in the inventories for the agriculture and land use sector;
* A high-level Bioeconomy Implementation Group;
* Publication of the Agriculture, Forest and Seafood Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan;
* European Innovation Partnerships projects focusing on themes such as: the preservation of agricultural landscapes; water quality; resource efficiency; climate mitigation / adaptation and biodiversity;
* Number of workshops including the Grassland Symposium, the Cross-sectoral Seminar on Climate Change Adaptation and the 2018 Environmental Sustainability Dialogue;
* Public consultation and publication of the climate and air roadmap for the agriculture sector;
* Research projects such as LANDMARK Project and scheme evaluations including Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) and Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS).

**5. If your State is one of the 156 UN Member States that recognizes the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, has this right contributed to preventing, reducing, or eliminating environmental impacts caused by the unstainable production or consumption of food? If so, how? If not, why not?**

Answer four refers to examples of positive environmental actions that have taken place.

**6. Please provide specific examples of good practices in preventing, reducing, or eliminating environmental impacts caused by the unstainable production or consumption of food. These examples may occur at the international, regional, national, sub-national, or local level. Examples may involve monitoring food quality; guaranteeing procedural rights (e.g. public access to food information, public participation in decision-making about the environmental impacts of producing or consuming food, access to remedies); new technologies; legislation, regulations, standards, jurisprudence and policies that address the environmental impacts of the food system; and initiatives to achieve healthy and sustainably produced food (e.g. halting land conversion for agriculture, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing air and water pollution, supporting agroecology, agroforestry, organic farming and closed-loop aquaculture, increasing efficiencies, promoting healthy and sustainable diets such as plant-based, and avoiding food waste). Where**

**possible, please provide evidence related to the implementation, enforcement, and effectiveness of the good practices.**

Please see answer four.

**7. Please identify specific challenges that your Government, business, or organization**

**has faced in attempting to employ a rights-based approach to address the**

**environmental impacts of food systems and the consequences of these problems for**

**human rights.**

The interconnectedness of policies for food, health, climate and the environment in addressing the great global challenges is clear and has come into increasing focus at international level. The draft Agri-Food Strategy to 2030[[7]](#footnote-7) proposes that this should be recognised within national policy, through using a food systems approach, which is an innovation by comparison to previous agri-food strategies. There is a need for policy coherence between food, climate and environment; food and health; and between domestic and foreign/development cooperation policy. This will involve challenges of political and policy coordination and require new structures and ways of working. While there are synergies, equally there will have to be trade-offs and compromises.

The draft Strategy suggests that the issue of food and health should be brought to a new level of political and policy importance. A national conversation should begin about securing the nation’s future health. This will require both a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach so that all can be part of a vision to deliver on improved food systems.

In moving towards sustainability becoming more embedded in the agri-food system, the issue of policy sequencing, timeframes for implementing policy change, and the use of the Just Transition approach will be important.

**8. Please specify ways in which additional protection is provided (or should be provided) for small-holders and populations who may be particularly vulnerable to unhealthy and unsustainably produced food (e.g. women, children, persons living in poverty, members of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic, racial, religious or other minorities, migrants and displaced persons). How can these populations be empowered to produce and consume healthy and sustainably produced food?**

Social sustainability of primary producers is influenced by factors within the agri-food sector, but equally by factors outside the sector, such as the performance of the wider rural and coastal economy. For farming, the family farm model is key to social sustainability. A number of aspects feed into improving the viability and well-being of primary producers and the broader rural community: the influence of age and the challenge of generational renewal; attracting new entrants, ideas and innovation; gender balance; LGBTI+ inclusivity; education and training; health and safety; mental health and well-being and rural development generally. Ultimately, addressing these will enhance the quality of life of primary producers and make an important contribution to their overall sustainability. There are a number of related actions listed in Ireland’s Agri Food Strategy to 2030. Teagasc[[8]](#footnote-8) Sustainability Reporting should broaden to incorporate issues such as: generational renewal and collaborative farming models; gender balance; diversity and Inclusion; education and training; and health and safety (including incidence of farm accidents, stress and rates of isolation). The new ‘Whole Farm Sustainability Planning Service’ to be offered by Teagasc should include social sustainability measures.

* Protect and enhance cultural heritage, physical and intangible, which is an important source of wellbeing and of broader social sustainability of rural areas.
* Continue to provide appropriate Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) supports to encourage generational renewal, including older farmers.
* Pursue progressive taxation policies, especially to promote land mobility and assist succession, including the early inter-generational transfer of farms, to support both younger and older farmers.
* Support and further develop collaborative farming models.
* Ensure adequate access to finance for young farmers and fishers in the context of access to finance generally.
* Promote the diversity of careers in agriculture and seafood and address negative perceptions of farming and fishing.

Other actions outlined in the report to increase gender balance include:

* Promote women’s participation in farming through Ireland’s Knowledge Transfer (KT) Groups facilitated by a female advisor. This is in keeping with the spirit of the KT Programme where like minded farmers who experience similar challenges and opportunities form groups.
* Hold a National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture
* Capture gender data on policy implementation e.g. participation by women in schemes and measures
* Represent the agri-food sector in the development of the next National Women and Girl’s Strategy due to be published in 2022.

**9. How do you ensure that the rights of environmentalists working on food issues (environmental human rights defenders) are protected? What efforts has your Government, business, or organization made to create a safe and enabling environment for them to freely exercise their rights without fear of violence, intimidation, or reprisal?**

Ireland would be considered a safe place for environmentalists working on food issues.

Ireland protects the right to peaceful protest under the Constitution of Ireland (Bunreacht na hÉireann)[[9]](#footnote-9).

**10. There is substantial evidence that the actions of high-income States (e.g. High levels of meat consumption, excessive calories, and food waste) are linked to adverse effects on food availability, food quality and ecosystem health in low- and middle-income States. What are ways in which high-income States should assist low-income States in reducing the environmental impacts of food systems while promoting healthy and sustainably produced food?**

Ireland seeks to assist low-income States to reduce the environmental impacts of food systems while promoting healthy and sustainably produced food by:

1. Promoting a Sustainable Food Systems Approach through its work in food and agriculture;
2. Encouraging and facilitating knowledge transfer and investment to support innovation in the agri-food sector and in scaling up the production of climate resilient, nutritious foods.

Ireland’s international development policy *A Better World* (2019) identifies Food and Agriculture as a key cluster for channelling its interventions to transform people’s lives. The policy recognises that agriculture and food systems are central to a sustainable future and that increasingly complex human and environmental health challenges posed by food systems demand systemic responses. Ireland recognises that sustainable agri-food systems properly nourish, provide energy, damage neither health nor environment, and support equitable access to resources.

Ireland will continue to champion efforts on how to scale-up nutrition at country level to tackle under-nutrition, improving linkages to the management of acute malnutrition. Linkages to the emerging need to tackle food systems, to the role of nutrition in the humanitarian development nexus, to climate adaptation, to gender inequality and our engagement with the private sector will all receive additional attention and effort. In this integrated response, the Irish Government will strengthen how it works with other bodies including Teagasc and Irish universities. Identifying the replicable aspects of our own experience will continue to be a part of this.

*A Better World* commits Ireland to adopting a sustainable food systems approach in its work on agriculture, value chains and private sector development as it focuses on supporting climate resilient smallholder agriculture and the production of nutritious crops. A systematic approach to hunger and undernutrition within sustainable food systems will consider the interactions between the biological, economic and social systems around food production, distribution and consumption. Ireland will take an evolving approach to food systems that builds on a strong track record in reaching the poorest, tackling hunger and fostering sustainable livelihoods

Ireland’s approach to food systems recognises that the SDG framework encompasses emerging climate-resilient and agro-ecological approaches to agriculture and food production. This expands the remit of agriculture to not only supply the required calories but also ensure local food and nutrition security, safeguard natural resources and ecosystem services, and adapt to and mitigate climate change.

As part of this approach, Ireland has sought to take a leadership role in supporting and participating in the 2021 UN’s Food Systems Summit and the relevant events that will precede and follow it, including national and independent dialogues. The Summit offers a unique opportunity for different stakeholders to discuss pathways for real structural change that can make food systems more efficient, resilient, healthy, sustainable, and equitable.

The creation of a ‘green economy’ in many countries is paving the way for an unprecedented wave of innovation and social mobilisation, especially among young people in responding to climate change and its impacts. *A Better World* recognises that smart investment in sustainable agriculture has the potential to support women’s economic empowerment and youth employment, with a focus on commercialising farms and strengthening agri-food value chains.

The transformation of Irish agriculture, and the associated wealth of technological and market innovation and research, is a basis for Irish engagement with global food systems and markets. Ireland has also developed a unique partnership approach to extension, value addition and to food safety standards. It will continue to explore the potential of harnessing this expertise and experience and identify synergies to add to our development cooperation. This will involve sharing lessons of change with developing countries where relevant and appropriate. Shared challenges in adapting to sustainable paths are another aspect.

Knowledge transfer, linking farmers to markets and access to credit and investment are important to progress agriculture in development. Ireland seeks to build on good practice in knowledge transfer between Irish organisations and counterparts in developing countries and will look to its private sector engagement activities including the Africa Agri Food development Programme (a matched-finance grant instrument) to develop partnerships between the Irish Agri-Food Sector and companies in Low-Income States to support sustainable, pro-poor growth of the local food industry, create markets for local produce, as well as strengthen links between these countries and Ireland.

Another example of Ireland’s efforts to facilitate innovation and share knowledge from its own experience and areas of expertise is by supporting specific knowledge-sharing events. In 2019, the Government of Ireland supported a high-level food systems policy-coaching event in Kigali, Rwanda. Hosted by the Government of Rwanda, FAO and the African Union Commission, it brought together policy makers and agri-food industry representatives from Ireland, Angola, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The event was an opportunity to share experiences about how to approach policymaking that fosters innovation and sustainability. It was also a great opportunity for Ireland to share our own expertise in transforming the agri-food sector in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

**11. For Businesses, what policies or practices are in place to ensure that activities, products, and services across the entire food system (production, processing, distribution, marketing, retail, food loss and waste) achieve healthy and sustainably produced food and meet human rights standards, especially those articulated in the Guiding Principle on Business and Human Rights?**

In Ireland, the National Plan on Business and Human Rights (2017-2020)[[10]](#footnote-10) informs and supports practices to ensure that activities, products, and services across the entire food system achieve healthy and sustainably produced food and meet human rights standards. The National Plan was updated in April 2021[[11]](#footnote-11) with new guidance on business and human rights for business enterprises in Ireland. This guidance was developed by the Implementation Group for the National Plan on Business and Human Rights under the inaugural National Plan.

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) that were adopted in 2011 have informed Ireland’s National Plan, which is a whole of government initiative, which seeks to give effect to the UNGPs in Ireland.

1. [Special Report on Climate Change and Land — IPCC site](https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [The right to water for food and agriculture (fao.org)](http://www.fao.org/3/ca8248en/ca8248en.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [-Climate\_Change\_and\_Human\_Rightshuman-rights-climate-change.pdf.pdf (unep.org)](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/9530/-Climate_Change_and_Human_Rightshuman-rights-climate-change.pdf.pdf?sequence=2&amp%3BisAllowed=) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf (irishaid.ie)](https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [gov.ie - April 21: Sustainable Food Systems and Ireland’s 2030 Agri-Food Strategy (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d9fcc-april-21-sustainable-food-systems-and-irelands-2030-agri-food-strategy/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [gov.ie - Food Wise 2025 (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a6b0d-food-wise-2025/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [gov.ie - Public Consultation on the Environmental Assessment of the Draft Agri-Food Strategy to 2030. (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/bd894-public-consultation-on-the-environmental-assessment-of-the-draft-agri-food-strategy-to-2030/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Teagasc | Agriculture and Food Development Authority](https://www.teagasc.ie/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [Irish Statute Book](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020.pdf (dfa.ie)](https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/National-Plan-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-2017-2020.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [Guidance-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-15-April-2021.pdf (dfa.ie)](https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/humanrights/Guidance-on-Business-and-Human-Rights-15-April-2021.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)