**UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD**

**Call for Inputs: Food systems and human rights**

**Submission by Ireland**

**June 2021**

*Food systems and human rights*

1. What are the most salient challenges facing the food systems in your country/region? Please explain why.

As explained in Ireland’s international development policy, *A Better World[[1]](#footnote-1)*, 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.

1. What are the examples of ways in which the challenges facing the global food system are having adverse impacts on human rights broadly, and the right to food specifically?

The seminal Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on Climate Change on Land (2019) 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), and UNEP’s Climate Change and Human Rights report (2015).

1. Are there specific challenges that your country has faced in attempting to employ a rights-based approach to transforming food systems without leaving anyone behind?

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. Ireland’s draft Agri-Food Strategy to 2030[[2]](#footnote-2) 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.

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.

1. To what extent has the UN Food System Summit considered those challenges in its deliberations? Please explain.

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

1. What are the specific obligations of States and responsibilities of businesses in terms of preventing and addressing adverse impacts caused by the unsustainable production or consumption of 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* identifies Food and Agriculture as a key cluster for channeling 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[[3]](#footnote-3) 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.

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. This involves 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.

Ireland’s National Plan on Business and Human Rights[[4]](#footnote-4) seeks to give effect to aspects of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) through a series of whole of government commitments. Under the Plan, guidance on the implementation of the UNGPs has been published and disseminated to business representative groups and companies around the country.

Ireland’s pioneering food and drink sustainability programme, Origin Green, operates on a national scale to unite the Government, the private sector and the full supply chain from farmers and food producers to the foodservice and retail sectors. Origin Green is the world’s only national food and drink sustainability programme and allows the industry to set and achieve measurable sustainability targets whilst respecting the environment and servicing the local communities more effectively.

Verified Origin Green members now account for 90% of Ireland’s food and drink exports and over 70% of our domestic retail market.

The benefits of this programme include more environmentally aware farms, a focus on communities and sustainable food and drink production, which contribute to sustainable livelihoods.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implements its food waste prevention programme through the National Waste Prevention Programme[[5]](#footnote-5). This Programme targets food waste in households, across the supply chain and in the hospitality sector through delivering campaigns and supports. It aims to achieve the national food waste target for a 50% reduction of food waste by 2030.

1. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, what are specific examples of rights-based initiatives and good practices (including policy, standards and programmes) that have successfully improved people’s access to adequate food in a sustainable and systemic way?

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.

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).

*Participation and access to information during the Food Systems Summit*

1. To what extent was the information on the Summit accessible, clear and practical for you and your community and partners?

Information was limited, lacking clarity and the necessary detail from the beginning of the process. The complications caused by the pandemic undoubtedly affected the planning and preparation process, but key decisions such as the structure and location of the (pre) Summit took an extraordinary amount of time to be finalised.

Member State involvement was poorly coordinated, with the Advisory Committee having little input into key decision making, until the establishment of the informal Group of Friends of the Food Systems Summit (GoFFSS) in Rome. The GoFFSS has been the main entry point for Member State contributions on the Summit over the past year and has significantly improved the role of the Member State in the Summit process. The willingness of the Special Envoy and Deputy Special Envoy to engage with the GoFFSS should be recognised and commended.

Despite the improved exchange facilitated by the GoFFSS, key information on the Summit is still not finalised, such as the details of the agenda for the pre-Summit at the end of July, the Summit date in September, how Member States can play a role in the formation and promotion of Coalitions of Action etc. The continued lack of information and clarity is impeding planning and will affect the success of the final pre-Summit and Summit event.

Finally, the flow of information, and the level of transparency on process, via Action Track 1 (the Action Track that Ireland has focus its participation on) has been very consistent and relevant throughout the past six months, which is also commendable given the challenges with information flow previously flagged.

1. In what ways have you participated in the Summit (events, dialogues, submission of inputs etc.)? Please describe the nature and content of your participation, if applicable.

Ireland has participated in the Summit through: Action Track 1 Leadership Team and Action Areas; National Dialogues; cross-system events and presentations; promotion of solutions and coalitions of action. Ireland has also nominated a Champion to the Champions Network, Mr. Tom Arnold, who has also been appointed as Ireland’s Special Envoy on Food Systems. Ireland was also one of the first Member States to provide financial support to the Trust Fund and to specific work streams of Action Track 1.

1. To what extent would you consider your participation in the FSS as active and meaningful? Please explain.

Ireland was one of the first Member States to support the call for a UN Food Systems Summit, with the Government of Ireland providing a letter of support, which accompanied the Summit submission made by the Rome-Based Agencies to the UN Secretary-General in New York. Ireland has ensured an active and meaningful role in the Summit preparatory process since its official announcement on World Food Day 2019. Ireland has focused on supporting the Summit at national level, through the hosting of national food systems summit dialogues that attracted over 8,300 participants over four sessions. In addition, Ireland has supported the Summit through active engagement in the Leadership Team and across all three Action Areas of Action Track 1. Ireland is continuing to champion the Summit through its leadership in two solutions on Food Systems Transformation Pathways and Resetting Wasting in the run up to the pre-Summit in Rome at the end of July and the Summit event in New York in September.

*Outcomes of the Food Systems Summit*

1. What are your expectations from the Summit’s outcomes following its conclusion in October 2021? How would these outcomes contribute to the full realization of the right to food for all?

Ireland expects that the Summit will reemphasise a rights based approach to food system transformation that will re-emphasise the right to food for all. This rights based approach should be carried through to the implementation phase of the Summit to 2030, and be a fundamental component of the follow-up and review process.

11. What would be the most optimal implementation process of the Summit’s outcomes? Which international and regional frameworks or forums could serve as a useful platform? Please explain.

In Ireland’s opinion, the Rome-Based Agencies of the UN are the logical choice to lead the implementation of the Summit outcomes, in partnership with other pivotal UN agencies (i.e. WHO, UNEP, UNICEF and UNDP), the IFI’s, and all other food systems actors and stakeholders. Implementation should also include concrete feedback loops to the UN Secretary General’s office throughout the coming decade leading up to 2030.

12. How do you envisage your role in the implementation of the Summit’s outcomes?

The implementation process must maintain the inclusive focus of the Summit, while ensuring the meaningful delivery of outcomes that can achieve the necessary transformation of our global, regional, national and local food systems. As a Member State, Ireland will play its role by delivering on the comments set out at national level and by supporting the RBAs and other development partners to deliver on the outcomes of the Summit, including follow-up and review.

1. [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-1)
2. [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-2)
3. Teagasc is the state agency providing research, advisory and education in agriculture, horticulture, food and rural development in Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [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-4)
5. [Circular economy | Environmental Protection Agency (epa.ie)](https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/circular-economy/) [↑](#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)