

## Stakeholder Consultation – Integrated action towards food systems transformation in India

### Background Note

#### Introduction

Food systems encompass all people, institutions, and processes by which agricultural products are produced, processed, and brought to consumers (FAO 2013). Food systems act as one of the key drivers shaping the political, socio-economic, ecological, and cultural fabric of societies. They have contributed to significant achievements, such as food security for a large population, mitigating some forms of malnutrition, reducing poverty, and enhancing life expectancy. However, the evolution of food systems has also worsened critical challenges, such as persistent hunger, malnutrition, obesity, biodiversity loss, exploitation of natural resources, and climate change. The current global food and land use systems are estimated to cause economic losses exceeding USD 12 trillion annually, compared to the market value of USD 10 trillion of food systems, leading to a USD 2 trillion loss. These hidden costs include health impacts, environmental degradation, and structural poverty (FOLU 2019; Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2024).

India faces significant challenges within its food system. Approximately 194 million people are undernourished, while 43.3 million children under five years of age are stunted. Moreover, obesity affects roughly 20 percent of the adult population. The agriculture sector in India, engaging over 50 percent of the workforce, faces critical obstacles such as gaps in climate change adaptation and water depletion, threatening both food and livelihood security. Perverse policies further contribute to excessive water withdrawals, soil degradation, and chemical runoff, highlighting India's status as a global hotspot for nitrogen pollution (Das et al. 2023).

#### Food System Economics Commission (FSEC)

[The Food System Economics Commission \(FSEC\)](#), a global vehicle of FOLU established to provide policymakers with a global analysis of the benefits of transforming food systems, has produced a [global report](#) on the transformation of food and land use systems. The report estimates the hidden costs linked to the current food systems and identifies the elements of what a transformation from today's food systems to an inclusive, health-enhancing, and environmentally sustainable global food system entails. FSEC's analysis of India's food system reveals hidden costs of USD 1.5 trillion annually, primarily driven by poor nutritional

outcomes and unsustainable production practices. FSEC's transformation scenario for India suggests that these costs could be slashed by a quarter, equivalent to about USD 300 billion annually (Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2024; Lord 2023). This reduction would result from healthier diets, reduced environmental impacts, socio-economic improvements, and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. Efforts for addressing these issues separately through different mechanisms are not adequate on their own. Thus, there is an urgent need to prioritize comprehensive food system transformation with a systemic approach.

In its [India Policy Brief](#), FSEC has outlined criteria for integrated national strategies towards this transformation. These include adopting a comprehensive policy framework to avoid unintended consequences, inclusive governance mechanisms, and organizational and technical capacities for implementation. At the same time, it is expected that national strategies will include various policies such as incentives, regulations, innovation, and investment. FSEC has identified five policy priorities at the global level, including shifting consumption patterns towards healthy diets, resetting incentives for agriculture, targeting revenue from new taxes to support transformation, innovating to increase labour productivity and workers' livelihood opportunities, and scaling up safety nets to ensure food affordability for the poorest (Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2024). These priorities are meant to set the stage for regional and national-level deliberations to advance India's food system transformation.

## **Regional Consultation**

FOLU aims to disseminate the outcomes of the FSEC report to different countries, translating this global understanding to country action through joint efforts towards the transformation of food systems. Considering the diversity of the food systems in a country like India, FOLU India Country platform would like to conduct three regional consultations to forge better understanding of action pathways and build consensus and networks for collective efforts. The one-day-long regional consultations aim to engage stakeholders from diverse sectors to discuss and deliberate on the recommendations proposed by FSEC and seek inputs on how these recommendations can be adopted for creating action plans for food system transformation in India.

These consultations will be co-organized with organizations that have a deep understanding of the regional scenarios and stakeholder landscape. The consultation for the northeastern region will be jointly organized with Balipara Foundation on **23rd August at Taj Vivanta, Guwahati, Assam.**

## **Consultation Structure**

The consultation will commence with an introductory presentation by Balipara Foundation in collaboration with FOLU India, providing an overview of their work. Subsequently, there will be a presentation highlighting the overall initiatives of the FSEC and its India-specific recommendations, followed by a general discussion on these recommendations.

For an in-depth discussion among all participants, they will be organized into three thematic breakout groups based on their expertise and interests to discuss the pathways for achieving this transformation. The three themes are as follows: I) Comprehensive policy frameworks, II) Focus on key areas with maximum impacts, and III) Governance mechanisms.

Each thematic group, after deliberating on the recommendations, will develop a summary presentation on the outcome of their discussion and report back for comments from other groups. The organizing team will document these discussions for further consideration at the

national level dialogues. Outcomes of these discussions will be considered for formulation of the initial action areas of the Food Systems Hub (FSH), a national-level collaborative platform initiated by FOLU India and Bharat Krishak Samaj.

FSH aims to bring together diverse stakeholders including policymakers, researchers, market players, and civil society organizations to address complex food system challenges. It seeks to promote climate-appropriate and resilient systems that enhance food security, nutritional security, and environmental sustainability through knowledge integration, information dissemination, and stakeholder engagements.

### **About FOLU**

[Food and Land Use Coalition \(FOLU\)](#) is a global community of countries, partner organizations, and Ambassadors working to advance sustainability, equity, and resilience in food and land use systems. Created in 2017, FOLU supports diversity, embraces disruptive thinking, and forges consensus through an evidence-based approach. The Coalition empowers farmers, policymakers, businesses, investors, and civil society to unlock collective action at scale. It presently operates in 10 countries, including India. FOLU India's vision is a nutritionally secure, healthy, and prosperous India, which is sustainably managing its food and land use systems, supported by a productive, efficient, and inclusive economy. The FOLU Coalition in India includes the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRAN), The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), and WRI India.

### **About Balipara Foundation**

[Balipara Foundation](#) is dedicated to promoting ecological conservation and socio-economic development in the Eastern Himalaya through its unique approach of Naturenomics™. The foundation works closely with indigenous communities, integrating traditional knowledge with modern practices to ensure sustainable livelihoods while conserving biodiversity. Their projects focus on habitat restoration, community-based conservation, and creating green livelihoods to foster harmony between people and nature.



