



The Montpellier Process: Pooling collective intelligence to transform food systems

Preamble: History, origins and intent of the Montpellier Process.

In 2021 and 2022, more than 300 individuals and institutions working at the science-policy interface and with a common concern about the systemic challenges for food systems transformation met in Montpellier, France.

They concluded that:

- despite the global scientific and political consensus around the need – as affirmed during the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit - for radical transformation of our food systems to better match global health, environmental and socio-economic challenges;
- despite the growing threats that climate change, biodiversity erosion, environmental degradation, economic and social disparities, and conflicts are placing on food security; and;
- despite the considerable available scientific evidence on what to do and how to do it, food systems transformation is still not happening with either the necessary speed, scale, or impact.

It was also recognized that knowledge communities must radically change the way they operate if they are to address the interconnected challenges of agriculture, ecosystem and natural resource management, food, climate change, biodiversity, health and equity ('Feed, Protect and Care') in an integrated way and ensure that they contribute effectively to the significant acceleration required in global food systems transformation. They identified two key challenges:

1. How can science and knowledge on the one hand, and policy and action on the other hand better inform and interact with each other?
2. How can existing multiple forms of knowledge better contribute to policy convergence at global level, policy coherence at all levels, while supporting design and implementation in ways that generate impactful changes now and in the future?

Responding to these challenges requires the creation of enabling conditions for continuous and iterative dialogue and knowledge sharing across regions, sectors and scales (local to global and back), between scientists, institutions, policymakers and, between the diversity of cultures that represent society at large. This was highlighted in the [Montpellier Declaration](#), issued on March 10, 2021, with an accompanying [commentary in Nature](#), which proposed possible strategies and avenues for accelerating food systems' transformation. Through the collaboration with Nature, the idea of "pooling collective intelligence" arose, which we now call *Montpellier Process: Pooling Collective Intelligence across Science and Policy for Action*.



On [October 2-3 of 2023](#), representatives of global organizations and groups of international experts met in Montpellier to further build on the deliberations and agreed needs identified in 2022 and to formulate options for collective responses to major societal challenges around the "feed-care-protect" nexus. The aim was to prepare, in advance of a larger convening planned for March 2024, a roadmap towards partnership across knowledge communities for food systems transformation, and to begin structuring a global community of practice, learning and action at the interface of science, policy, and society.

During the October 2023 meeting, the value, opportunities, and challenges of creating new synergies at the interfaces between science, policy and society were discussed from multiple perspectives, with the common goal of better enabling science to contribute to addressing the challenges facing people and planet - locally and globally, across disciplines and cultures. Learning from existing science-policy interface (SPI) mechanisms and processes, we deliberated common principles, priority topics, practical approaches, and innovative working methods, and aligned on the concrete commitments required from individuals and institutions to successfully take the Montpellier Process forward. These deliberations provided the basis for a larger, more globally representative and more action-oriented meeting, which was held in [Montpellier on 19-20 March 2024](#).

The March 2024 event brought together three hundred experts and decision-makers. This included scientists, policymakers and civil society representatives from sixty countries and five continents. For two days, and building on lessons learnt from concrete use cases, participants worked together to identify the imperatives for global knowledge communities to accelerate and amplify their contributions to urgent food systems transformation as a major entry point into progressing sustainable development. The aim was also to shape the further development of the Montpellier Process as an effective vehicle for convening international experts, scientific organizations, and civil society organizations to lead on and contribute to collectively addressing current and future global challenges by strengthening effective engagements and intentional dialogue between science, policy and society. The meeting yielded a radically inclusive process for harvesting and valuing hidden knowledges in contested areas of the science policy interface space.

This document summarizes the agreed outcomes of this event, including the objectives, key principles, and concrete work that we, as an emerging global community of interfacing practice, learning and action, are committed to taking as part of the Montpellier Process and in service to urgent progress in feeding the global community, caring for its people, and protecting the planet.



The context that brings us together

Our world is one of “polycrisis” with multiple converging risks and threats showing no signs of abatement. Increasing conflicts and major geopolitical disruptions, growing inequality and either insufficient progress or serious setbacks in meeting globally agreed goals, are fuelling existential concerns about humanity’s future. The science confirms that climate change has transitioned from a potential to an actual threat with strong impacts on communities globally, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized ones. Six of the nine planetary boundaries have been transgressed¹ with significant risk of triggering irreversible tipping points². Nearly half of the world’s population currently struggles to access healthy diets in one form or another placing stress on global health, social and environmental systems¹. Disparities in access to meaningful livelihoods, healthy food, and stable environments are exacerbating global inequities³. These are some of the crises that stand in the way of securing the safe, equitable and sustainable futures we all want.

In this context, the world arguably needs knowledge and evidence more than ever before. Yet the voice of science is too often misunderstood, misused, ignored or does not meet the need of policy- advisors and –decision-makers. There have never been as many science-policy interfaces and advisory mechanisms, or assessments produced on, for example, the state of biodiversity, environmental degradation, or climate change. However, their adoption and action in both the policy and public domains remains well below what is needed to respond to these challenges. We need a correction of course: one that makes knowledge actionable and, by implication, makes action knowledgeable.

Our response: The Montpellier Process

Through participation in the Montpellier Process, we respond to today’s challenges by addressing the imperative of action: transformation of societies and systems by transforming how knowledge communities collaborate and contribute their knowledge to the achievement of the global goals, to 2030 and beyond.

This requires a common vision and shared commitment to action. The Montpellier Process is a collective undertaking that emphasizes the active role that knowledge and action communities, collectively, can and should take as participants in pooling collective intelligence on current processes and identifying plausible and desirable solutions. The essence of our process lies in the transformative impact we want to generate by collectively redefining how we operate, engage, and collaborate as a globally inclusive knowledge community, that also acts locally focused on solutions that may contribute to impact at scale.

We consider the Montpellier Process unique in that it brings together multiple constituencies, broadening the space for practitioners to reflect on SPI processes, to learn from each other, and from the multiple existing initiatives. The scope of the Montpellier Process is wider than any



single sector, enabling reflection on bridging narratives and leverage effects across sectors thus drawing attention to, and focusing on, cross sector opportunities and synergies that enable progress and action. Finally, it brings together actors who think and act at different scales, ranging from local to global and back while seeking both complementarity and consistency.

Box 1: Definitions

Transformation: Long-lasting and profound systems change, including at the level of values, institutions and the policies and practices they sustain, as opposed to piecemeal or incremental change that narrowly focused and siloed policies, projects and programmes may yield². Transformational change is intentional and directional.

Knowledge Communities: Collectives/groupings of actors that bring diverse forms of knowledge, including Indigenous Peoples', local, traditional, and experiential or practitioner knowledge together. As stated by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, other systems of knowledge and ways of knowing coexist with science, including local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, and have an important role to play in the global dialogue.

Science-Policy Interfaces (SPIs): institutional arrangements, fora, processes and/or organizations whose task is to facilitate dialogue between scientists, policymakers and, in some cases, other societal actors in support of inclusive evidence-based policymaking. SPIs can range in levels of formality, from 'informal network approaches' with flexible structures to well-established 'platform models' based on extended and well-defined institutional arrangements and mandates. We recognize that there is a diversity of science policy interfaces, including many which either make efforts to be more inclusive of society or recognise the need to do so. We include this diversity in referring to SPI's.

Science: the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on theory, including evidence originating from a diversity of knowledge communities.

Our agreed focus for action: Food systems as an entry point to systemic issues.

Why focus on food systems? We recognize that systemic approaches require considering interaction across systems, and that defining focal boundaries remains challenging. However, the Global Sustainable Development Reports^{3,4} identified food systems as one of six entry points for transformation. The Montpellier Process has initially decided to focus on food systems as central to its core objectives of Feed, Care, Protect, while recognizing interactions with other systems (climate and environment, transportation, health, energy, etc.).

While food systems have been effective and currently produce enough food to feed the world¹, they are not sufficiently equitable, and carry significant social and environmental costs⁵. They



have an outsized impact on the environment, accounting for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions⁶ and 40% of land allocations⁷, with even larger impacts on soil and water pollution, freshwater consumption and biodiversity loss³. Oceans are significantly pressured and overfished, with both marine and freshwater ecosystems heavily impacted by pollution and demand for renewable wind energy. Food systems are currently a driver of poor health with more than half of the world's population struggling to access healthy diets⁶. Food underpins cultural identity and is easy to communicate, with agents ranging from family members to policymakers. It is increasingly clear that the existing global conventions' goals cannot be met without significant contributions from food system interventions. The efforts currently being made by countries to identify and implement national food system pathways presents an impactful and accessible policy cycle which is seeking participation, interaction and contributions from the knowledge community, as mentioned by the UNFCCC¹ COP28 Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action². Finally, with food at the intersection of several formal Intergovernmental Panels, articulating effective science-policy interfaces and collaboration is needed to support action from a diversity of actors including countries, cities, companies, and citizens, and to navigate just and equitable transitions to resilient and sustainable food systems. We, the Montpellier Process, intend, in time, to extend our collective work to the full raft of interfaces, based on experimentation, innovation and ongoing learning and mutual problem-solving.

Box 2: Guiding Principles of the Montpellier Process

- **Pluralism and justice:** We value diversity and engage collaboratively and inclusively and recognize that doing so requires greater participation of diverse knowledge holders in the framing of discussions, in the process of transformation, as well as the inclusion of their knowledge as an outcome of transformation. This includes increased attention to amplifying and empowering historically excluded or marginalized voices such as those from the Global South, Indigenous Peoples, women, and youth.
- **Openness:** In the paradigm of open science, we commit to be open-minded about confronting institutional / structural constraints on the kinds of collaboration that will be required – and overcoming these. We are open to a diversity of opinions and means of operating, including with novel means of bringing the community together in innovative, virtual spaces. Openness is a vehicle for removing barriers for sharing data, information, and knowledge, as well as collaboration with the diverse stakeholders involved, in support of transformative change.
- **Equitable and inclusive engagement:** Scientists are participants in a process that includes a diversity of stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds, all of whom serve as partners in the co-creation of actionable knowledge. Scientists bring theories, methods, tools, expertise, experience, and systemic and systematic approaches

¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Combatting Climate Change

² <https://www.cop28.com/en/food-and-agriculture>



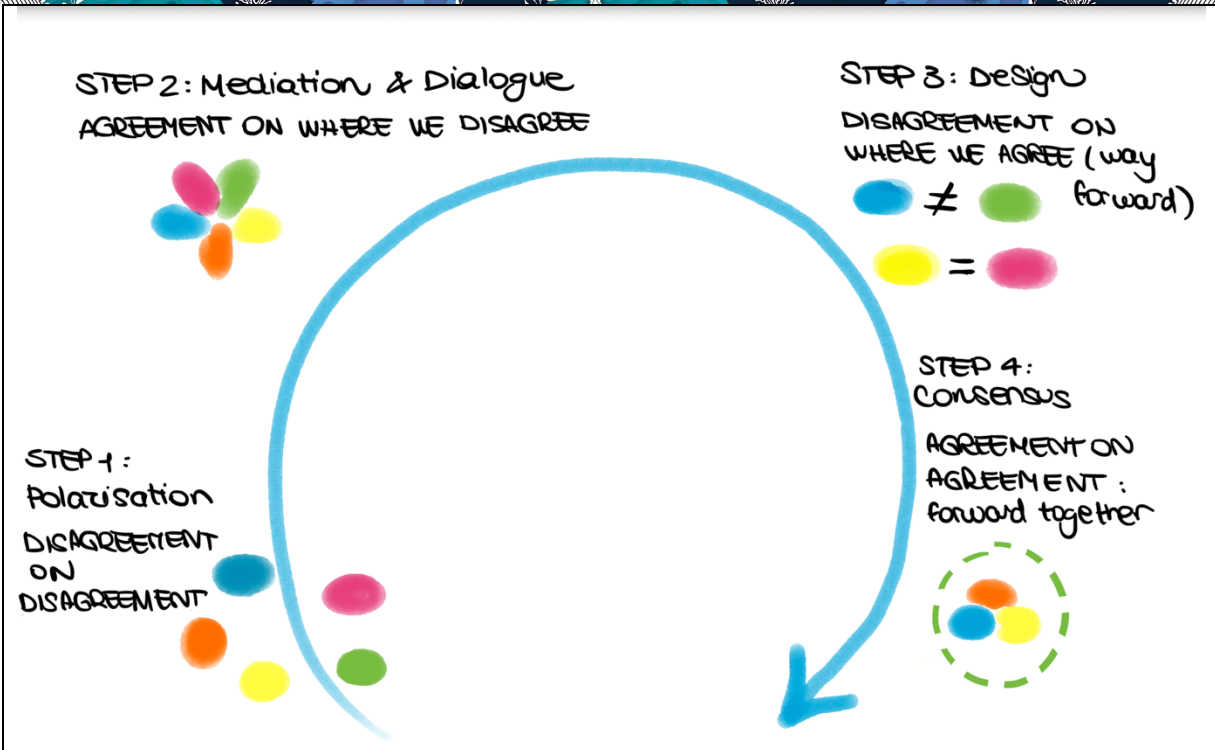
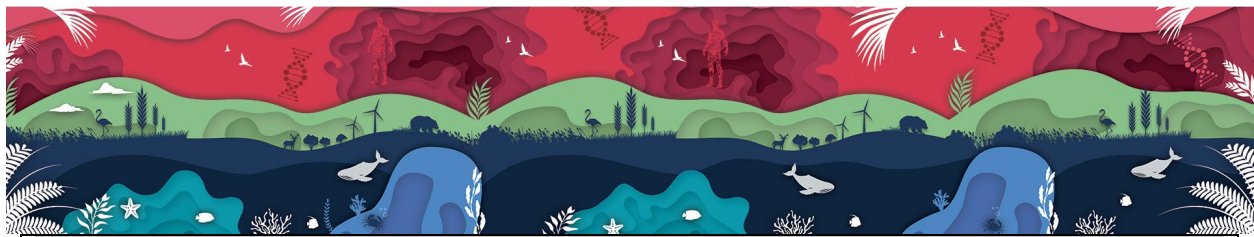
that both embrace and bring clarity to complexity in order to create solutions that work for all stakeholders.

- **The need to work across scales, domains, and disciplines:** Ensuring the convergence and consistency between contextualized local solutions and collective global action and impact at scale is key. Such a convergence is also required to address, prevent or remove trade-offs across sectorial economic activities and impacts with an emphasis on inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Transparency is part of the larger process of informed governance and organizational learning. Transparency increases reliability and contributes to accountability.

Our agreed objectives and ways of working

Paradoxically, we currently observe a profusion of initiatives in living use cases, notably cities and local actors taking initiative to drive food systems change, yet there remains a general polarization and procrastination that make impact at scale difficult. Hence the need to learn from on-going initiatives and build the required framework and environment. In such a context, we agree that the Montpellier Process seeks to stimulate and support actions that promote collaboration and learning across actors, institutions, and knowledge systems from local to global levels and with a focus on transforming science-policy interfaces to drive food systems' transformations. In line with this, the Process is intended to:

- Build an inclusive and action-oriented global community of practice committed to engage for purposes of increasing levels of ambition and capacity to transform local, national, and global science-policy interfaces and amplify their utility and impact.
- Provide “risky safe spaces” or safe spaces for risk taking where individuals and actors engage with a willingness to reflect on their own position, as well as those of others, and to act on that position recognizing their agency to act as a key driver of change (Box 3).



Box 3: The Montpellier Process aims to build “risky safe spaces” for risk taking to advance the needed dialogue, progress, and impact of Science-Policy Interfaces on the Global Goals. Risky Safe Spaces are designed to facilitate deep dialogue and understanding, notably on high tension topics. They create a space where individuals engage with a willingness to reflect on their own position, as well as those of others, and to act on that position recognizing their agency to act as a key driver of change, as well as the potentially limited agency of others. Step one recognizes that often we do not even understand why we disagree. This first step allows all actors to voice their positions free of judgement through mediation to understand the origins and rational behind polarized positions. This enables step two, through dialogue, understanding, reformulation and collectively agreeing on where members of the community disagree, and why this disagreement exists. Step 2 is a subtle precursor for step 3 which begins a process of deeper collective co-design refining where there are fundamental differences and the rational for those differences. That is, following mediation, and clear understanding of the origins and rational for differences – a collective understanding of the where there are fundamental differences whose origin is not a lack of understanding and empathy. And finally step four, when possible and relevant, through continued deliberate dialogue moving towards an agreement on agreement – which includes recognition of those points where disagreements persist and why they do so. The dashed red line outlining the four steps indicates the increasing level of effort needed to get to the fourth stage, but that even achieving steps 2 and 3 are powerful means of increasing understanding and alignment.

We affirm that the Montpellier Process will function not as a new organization, but as a collective, community-owned process, convened and curated for the community by an alliance of partners. Regular meetings of the community will serve as a cornerstone for the functioning of the Process. Further activities – formal and informal, at global or regional levels, initiated



collectively or by community sub-groups – will flow from those meetings and be shared for inspiration and learning with the community. More specifically, regular community gatherings will:

- Facilitate cross collaboration activities, both formal and informal, between SPIs with distinct disciplinary, geographic, or specific expertise with the aim of increasing their ability to share more actionable, coherent knowledge rooted in, informing, and responding to the needs of local, national, and global initiatives, and in collaboration with other actors working to feed, protect and care for people and planet.
- Support implementation and learning from living use cases contributing to strengthening science-policy interfaces, to transforming food systems at local and national levels and to impact at scale.
- Anticipate the global development agenda setting beyond 2030, including the framework of the United Nations International Decade for Science 2024-2033.

The actions we commit to:

The Community of Practice assembled through the Montpellier Process is committed to six pathways that call for concrete engagement to achieve its ambition.

- (1) **Strengthening and adapting institutional arrangements** between and within knowledge institutions, independent assessments and intergovernmental SPIs to make action knowledgeable and knowledge actionable, and to impact at scale. Creating risky safe spaces to learn from use cases and SPI's by replicating the Montpellier Process at various scales and in diverse geographies. Focusing on improving governance issues through cross learning how knowledge systems can be designed to cope with the tension points and the complexity of food systems transformation. Enabling collaboration across existing SPIs to pool collective intelligence and resources through collaborative peer reviews. Joint calls for thematic assessments, cross referencing and shared glossaries and databases.
- (2) **Enabling Knowledge and Training:** facilitating the engagement of science and knowledge platforms with use cases. Creating Policy Hubs and other spaces for scientists to be embedded in, or to participate in policy processes (policy sabbaticals, consultations, secondments, internships, and posts) at the local and national levels such as developing regional hubs and national policy labs. Creating a rapid response capability to address emerging policies and policy actions (e.g. Commentary, petitions, collective action).
- (3) **Acting on Inclusion:** enabling greater representation and diversity of participation in SPIs including leadership opportunities to the social sciences, and non-academic actors, through the development of a culture of honesty regarding both exclusion and injustices, recognizing those perspectives is crucial for just transformation, as well as just outcomes. Constantly reinventing how dialogues are run with a focus on the horizontal structures that were used in the Montpellier Process. Improving the Montpellier Process by



addressing important governance issues on the diversity and heterogeneity of contributors and power asymmetries. Ensuring that multiple, different, and regular entry points are maintained to continuously increase inclusion.

- (4) **Enabling Communication:** increasing the capacity to understand each other across science, policy, and society communities by strengthening mediation capacity and developing a common narrative across sectors, actors and institutions. Facilitating greater iterative and interactive dialogues between knowledge and policy communities to understand and formulate which questions should be addressed and which answers are needed (knowledge gaps) to implement policies that work for society and planet alike; while retaining the ability and independence to highlight the difficult questions that some actors may not want answered.
- (5) **Filling and Adapting the Knowledge Toolbox:** making a diversity of tools accessible to the knowledge and action communities, including an assessment of which of those tools need to be readied and improved in support of policy and action. The knowledge toolbox is not a model or blueprint but rather a portfolio of methods and best practices that can be mobilized to make sure that knowledge and technical tools are used appropriately and effectively as part of an interactive, inclusive, and integrative process.
- (6) **Navigating public-private convergence** to produce public goods: working with a diversity of private sector actors to help aligning shared objectives, notably on the production of public goods, and for science to be able to build trust and collaborate with the private sector in a transparent and fair way on common-pool outcomes beyond the recognition of diverging interests. This includes greater consensus on shared goals and the metrics associated with them, their use in the development of standards, and identification of innovations that contribute to public goods for society and planet alike.

Through the Montpellier Process, our objective is to enhance both our individual, institutional and collective actions in the realm of science-policy interfaces. The Montpellier Process will reconvene both where key opportunities arise to socialize, test and model its practice of science-policy interfacing and periodically to intentionally learn and progress its practice. We anticipate this to include convening dialogues in multilateral fora such as UN CDB COP16 in 2024, UNFCCC COP 30 in 2025, and the Stockholm Food Forum in 2025, as well as regional, national and local fora throughout this period.

The success of the Montpellier Process lies in its sustained co-ownership alongside diversity of active participation working towards the gamut of urgently needed scalable solutions that feed, protect and care for planet and people.

Signed by: The Participants of the Montpellier Process.



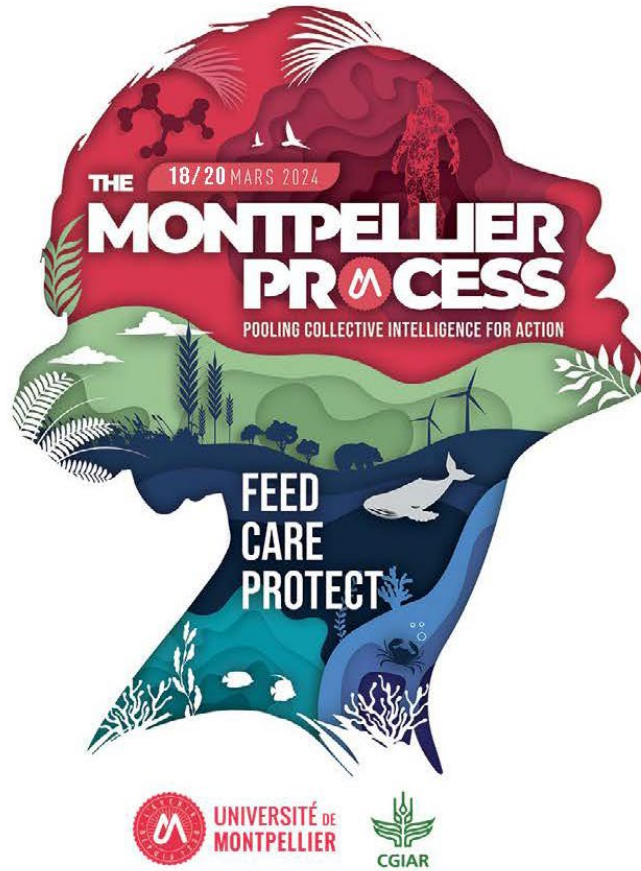
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