THE ASPEN DIALOGUE METHOD

The Aspen Method: The Aspen Institute seeks to improve the quality of leadership and the formation of policy through dialogue on challenges facing society and organizations. Since its inception, the Aspen dialogue process has been based on the premise of sincere interaction among engaged participants with diverse views in a collegial atmosphere that encourages respect for different opinions. In this setting, through moderated dialogue, Aspen invites the participants to become involved in the process of shaping first principles and recommendations necessary to unite leaders around a common action strategy.

Intentional Values-Based Dialogue: The Aspen Institute places particular significance on convening leaders in an intentional form of civil discourse about global issues. The meetings ensue based on Aspen’s time honored method of intentional values-based dialogue and, typically, produce a draft working publication as the dialogue progresses. This method of dialogue is the principal way in which a group reaches its observations, findings and recommendations, if any. It is based on the Aspen presupposition that authentic concordance among a group of people with expertise in various disciplines, representing diverse interests, must be grounded in shared values. It is by intentionally exploring these values—and strong differences in opinion—that new thinking is made possible. Critical to this process is a strict not-for-attribution rule that encourages candor and the exploration of new ideas.

Participant Work Product: Each day of each meeting will have a dedicated rapporteur who will capture the salient points of each discussion, both as a narrative for the final report and to assist the facilitator in organizing the findings and issues for future discussion. After each Dialogue, the rapporteurs, working with the facilitator and participants (between meetings), will produce an interim report for discussion purposes (at the next meeting) only. Participants are encouraged to develop agreed upon materials for subsequent meetings.

Not-for-Attribution Rule: In keeping with the Institute’s method of informed dialogue among people of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, the group will be challenged to weigh competing values and to approach policy issues holistically. A strict not-for-attribution rule encourages candor and the exploration of new ideas, and the informal atmosphere and collegiality encouraged respect for different opinions. All participants are asked to approach the dialogue with the intention of identifying areas of agreement, to learn from each other and to explore the sometimes competing values underlying policy disagreements. No computers; no cell phones.

Report of the Aspen Institute: A final report will be generated to capture a general narrative based on the group’s discussion throughout the Series. It is issued under the auspices of the Aspen Institute, and neither the meeting participants, nor the sponsor are responsible for its contents. The group’s “agreed upon” findings and/or recommendations will be expressly identified as such in the report. The rest of the report is the staff’s attempt to represent the views expressed at the meeting. Participants will not be asked to agree to the wording of the explanatory material with each recommendation, and some may differ with specific points.

Criteria for Success: The objective of the Food Security Strategy Group is to enable a group of diverse thought leaders, through moderated discussion and a free exchange of ideas, to explore some of the food security challenges and opportunities facing communities globally. To commence the dialogue, we open with a set of assumptions and/or hypotheses, and seek to develop a set of specific global values or principles upon which leaders can structure their plans for achieving food security within their relevant sectors. The success of this initiative will therefore be determined not only by recommendations or principles that may directly influence policymakers, businesses, markets and other actors, but also by the
ability of dialogue participants to formulate a set of global values upon which the group can agree to act and use to influence the actions of other leaders.

**Important Note on Food Security Strategy Group (FSSG) Expectations:** The FSSG, beginning with the launch dialogue in Morocco, is a high-level Track II deliberation. While the FSSG should focus attention on the "global" and "long-term" (20-25 year) horizon of food security, it should also be expected to spur new policy-relevant activities or recommendations. However, not all issues will advance or come to fruition at the same time, or with the same scale or scope. That is, some FSSG position outcomes will be prepared in advance (as papers or proposals), some will require more than one meeting to develop, and some will be recommended to another body for action or review. We will not attempt to tackle more than 2-3 major issues at any one meeting, although many more issues and topics will be suggested and put forward in the planning phase and during the meeting.

The FSSG will serve a different set of roles with respect to different issues, actions or initiatives proposed over different timelines - some near-term and some long-term but global on balance. For instance, in one case it may act as a policy incubator and conduit for feeding into Track I bilateral and multilateral talks; in another it may act as the voice of leadership to articulate and catalyze a major initiative. Some content will culminate in a final report, some will be put forward as Op-Eds by FSSG co-chairs or members. Regardless of what form certain outcomes or agreed upon proposals take, the FSSG participants agree to review and pursue an active level of output both long-term (as an essential purpose of the group) and more immediate ones (responsive to current developments that can be accelerated or accentuated by the prominence of the FSSG).

**The Aspen Institute:** The mission of the Aspen Institute is to foster enlightened leadership and open-minded dialogue. The Institute has significant experience convening leaders to engage in civil discourse on global societal issues, serving to inform and broadly influence debate and discussion.