

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

Capitalizing on Private Sector Accountability for Food Systems Transformation

26 June 2024

Summary Report

Introduction

The Food Systems Solutions Dialogues (FSSD) are purposeful and organized events that bring together National Convenors and other food systems actors to share their experiences and insights on food systems hosted by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (the Hub). A new series is launched each year, and morning and afternoon sessions are held for each Dialogue to accommodate different time zones. On 26 June 2024, the second Dialogue of the 2024 series was held on “Capitalizing on Private Sector Accountability” - this Summary Report reflects the combined discussions from the two sessions (morning and afternoon).

This Dialogue explored how to strengthen the private sector's role and accountability in supporting the implementation of food systems transformation pathways. It aimed to provide valuable insights and facilitate in-depth discussions on the private sector's impact on key areas such as the environment, nutrition, and social equity within food systems. Moreover, the Dialogue sought to advance understanding of how the private sector could contribute more effectively to sustainable food systems while reinforcing the Hub's ongoing efforts to enhance corporate accountability.

Setting the Scene

Ms Sylvia Ekra, Deputy Director of the Hub, opened the morning session, while Dr Stefanos Fotiou, Director, introduced the afternoon session.

In Ms Ekra's opening remarks, Ms Ekra stressed the importance of consolidating efforts around the private sector's role in food systems transformation. She recalled the 2021 Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), where private entities pledged their commitment to change through a formal declaration and how, in 2023, at the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS+2), the sector reaffirmed this declaration and their accountability, given its substantial influence and the many industries involved. Ms Ekra discussed how the Hub has collaborated with various partners and initiatives to prepare for the 2025 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS+4), including a workshop held in April 2024, which produced a comprehensive roadmap and guidance towards UNFSS+4 and beyond called [Corporate Accountability for Food Systems Transformation](#). The Hub plans to continue working with partners to develop a detailed theory of change for private sector accountability.

During the afternoon opening segment, Dr Fotiou underlined the private sector's pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He highlighted that approximately 75% of the resources required to implement and accelerate the SDGs are expected to originate from private sector contributions. He also reflected on the private sector's commitment, particularly through the [Business Declaration on Food System Transformation](#), which demonstrates the

potential for corporate engagement in addressing global challenges. Dr Fotiou outlined the work leading up to UNFSS+4, including developing a corporate accountability framework and consultations between the private sector, governments, and National Convenors, which is crucial in the process.

In both morning and afternoon sessions, Ms Ekra and Dr Fotiou welcomed a distinguished panel that included:

- Dr Lynette Neufeld, Director of the Food and Nutrition Division at FAO
- Ms Victoria Crawford, Director of Agriculture and Food at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development
- Mr Rayan Kassem, Engagement Manager at the World Benchmarking Alliance

Ms Mia Madsen, Policy Officer at the Hub, moderated the event.

Key Insights from Panellists

The Dialogue welcomed the panel of distinguished experts who shared their extensive experience and insights on private sector accountability and its role in food systems transformation.

Dr Neufeld began by discussing the challenges of malnutrition, the rising obesity rates, and micronutrient deficiencies affecting over 1.6 billion women and children. She stressed the importance of making nutritious foods available, affordable, and culturally appropriate and called for private sector commitments to reformulate products and support policies that promote healthy diets.

Ms Crawford highlighted the collaborative efforts with companies on key issues such as regenerative agriculture and ensuring living incomes. She emphasized strengthening corporate accountability mechanisms and aligning standards and regulations to drive meaningful business action in transforming food systems. Ms Crawford also noted several key levers critical to corporate accountability, including financial incentives, opportunities to scale investments, and the need to align policy incentives. A crucial aspect of using accountability as a driver for change is focusing on decision-useful information. To truly see accountability result in companies driving change through their supply chains and contributing to broader goals and national strategies, there is the need to prioritize information that can be integrated into capital allocation processes, inform monitoring, reporting, and verification, enhance procurement decisions, and facilitate engagement with investors.

The panel discussion closed with Mr Kassem, who presented an overview of the work done by the World Benchmarking Alliance in assessing the world's largest food and agriculture companies. He noted that many companies are not on track to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda and emphasized the need for corporate accountability. Mr Kassem highlighted key challenges for smallholder farmers, such as land ownership, market control, and fair pay. He recommended that the UN articulate the role of the private sector in achieving global agendas, improve standards and data disclosure, and ensure consequences for corporate actions.

Dialogue with National Convenors

Following the expert panel, the Dialogue moved into an interactive session with National Convenors, providing a platform for them to share insights and lessons learned on the role of the private sector in food systems transformation and how to strengthen corporate accountability in support of implementing National Pathways. The Convenors were provided with two guiding questions:

1. What support do you expect as a national convenor from the private sector on implementing the national food systems transformation pathway? • What elements of corporate accountability are crucial for supporting food systems transformation at country level?
2. The discussions underscored the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, transparent governance mechanisms, and the alignment of private sector actions with national and international food security goals. During the interactive session various National Convenors highlighted the critical role of the private sector in transforming food systems.

Interventions from the floor emphasized the expectation for private sector investments to support sustainable agriculture, enhance infrastructure, drive innovation and technology, and improve market access, especially for smallholder farmers and local producers. The importance of clear corporate accountability and reporting was underscored, leveraging established guidance from forums like the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and the Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) to enhance consumer confidence.

The Convenors stressed the need to integrate youth into public and private sectors to drive future transformations and highlighted the stabilizing effect of business cooperation in achieving sustainable food systems. Innovative agricultural practices, such as biofortification to combat nutrient deficiencies, were discussed, with invitations extended to SMEs to participate in such initiatives. The session also addressed economic and safety challenges, emphasizing enforcing safety standards for imported foods and promoting nutrient-rich diets despite high costs.

Experiences in developing national strategies targeting consumer behavior and supporting local, sustainable producers were shared, as well as the importance of the private sector's influence on public policies and the promotion of sustainable food systems through initiatives like short supply chains, circular economy projects, value-addition and technological innovation.

Overall, the Convenors highlighted the necessity of robust private sector involvement and accountability in building sustainable and resilient food systems. This multifaceted approach, incorporating investments, youth integration, innovative practices, and strategic partnerships, is crucial for achieving long-term sustainability in the global food system.

The Way Forward

In her closing remarks, the Hub's Deputy Director, Sylvia Ekra, underscored the complexity of regulatory frameworks and the multitude of standards that can deter private sector participation. She emphasized that the roadmap for UNFSS+4 aims to streamline and harmonize these standards, making them easier to comprehend and monitor for progress.

Ms Ekra highlighted the need for governments to communicate expectations and adopt a systems approach integrating various sectors and typologies within food systems. She also stressed the importance of effective public-private partnerships to ensure sustainable results, decent work, and improved service quality. Additionally, she noted that while progress is being made on climate commitments, there is a significant lag in addressing livelihoods, equity, and social justice. She called for a focus on incorporating healthy diets into value chains and ensuring these priorities are reflected in national pathways, advocating for nutrition-focused business models.

In his closing remarks, the Hub Director, Dr Fotiou, reiterated the importance of aligning public and private sector efforts to achieve the SDGs and the need for a collaborative and unified approach. He underscored the critical role of private sector accountability and the necessity of a regulatory environment that fosters sustainable business practices. Rather than focusing on criticism, he aimed to provide an objective, evidence-based evaluation of contributions from all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society. In addition, Dr Fotiou acknowledged the complexity and variability of impacts across different regions and sectors and the importance of a balanced approach that considers local contexts while striving for a cohesive accountability framework. He advocated for continued cooperation and open dialogue among governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to ensure collective progress.

The Hub Director and Deputy Director sincerely thanked all participants for their valuable contributions during the Dialogues. They emphasized the collaborative spirit at the heart of the corporate accountability initiative and conveyed optimism regarding the roadmap, theory of change, and developing a robust accountability framework. They encouraged stakeholders to stay engaged and informed, promising continued updates and discussions to refine and advance the collective efforts towards sustainable food systems transformation.