

Second UN Food Systems Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS+4) Investment Dialogue #6 – Concept Note

1. Title of the session

Investment Dialogue #6: Bridging Investments to Smallholder Farmers & SMEs through Value Chains

2. Type of Session

Investment Dialogue

3. Date and Time

Tuesday 29 July 2025 | 15:00 –16:20
Africa Hall

4. Session Background

This session, *Investment Dialogue #6: Bridging Investments to Smallholder Farmers & SMEs through Value Chains*, co-organized by UNIDO and the UN Global Compact, will explore how integrated agro-food parks (IAFPs) and seaweed aquaculture can serve as transformative models to accelerate food systems transformation. By focusing on the “hidden middle” of food value chains—logistics, infrastructure, and processing—the session highlights how targeted investments can unlock efficiencies and improve livelihoods for smallholders and SMEs.

Showcasing examples such as Ethiopia’s IAFPs, which have leveraged over \$1.1 billion in co-investment, and emerging seaweed value chains with strong climate and development benefits, the dialogue will demonstrate replicable pathways for scaling inclusive, sustainable food systems. The session directly contributes to UNFSS+4 objectives by unlocking finance, strengthening partnerships, and reflecting on progress since the Summit.

A diverse panel of government representatives from Ethiopia, Madagascar, and France, private sector leaders including Tetra Pak and agribusiness investors, international financial institutions, academia, and the UN Global Seaweed Coalition will share insights on de-risking tools, enabling policies, and the business case for investment.

By bringing together public and private actors, the session aims to elevate the recognition of IAFPs and seaweed aquaculture as high-impact strategies aligned with multiple SDGs, including poverty reduction, climate resilience, and marine restoration. The discussion will culminate in a call to action for scaling investment and collaboration ahead of UNGA80. Through this integrated approach, the session underscores that building strong, inclusive value chains is essential for transforming food systems and delivering on global sustainability commitments.

5. Session Context

Transformation of food systems is pressing: growing populations, climate change, and persistent rural poverty demand innovative, scalable solutions. A key challenge is the “hidden middle” – the infrastructure and logistics that connect smallholders to markets. Globally, 30 – 40 per cent of food chain value lies here, yet this segment is underinvested. IAFPs offer a compelling response by gathering processing facilities, utilities, and services to create economies of scale and reduce costs.

Ethiopia’s experience illustrates this model’s potential – its IAFPs have mobilized over USD 1.1 billion in public and private investment, linking smallholder farmers to markets, fostering rural industrialization, and boosting food security. Yet, many nations lack the enabling policies and public-private financing to replicate these successes – a clear gap this dialogue aims to address.

Similarly, integrated aquaculture – especially seaweed farming – is emerging on the global stage. Seaweeds play a key role in advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 14. They help mitigate ocean acidification, reduce marine pollution and support marine ecosystems. They can enhance food security and help eradicate poverty for millions of smallholders, especially in coastal communities. Around USD 10 million would be a good to support catalytic development of the supply chain. Equity investment in seaweed has been USD 650 million as a minimum since 2020; whilst 98 per cent of the production is in Asia and Africa, only 5 per cent of these investments have been made in equatorial climate seaweed.

This session bridges development models to spotlight opportunities and remaining bottlenecks in infrastructure, investment de-risking, and policy support. It arrives at an important moment: as the world seeks to accelerate outcomes ahead of UNGA 80, investments must align with SDGs, rural economic growth, and climate resilience. By featuring IAFPs and seaweed aquaculture – each with proven returns – the sessions addresses scaling resilient food systems. It responds to global trends and national ambitions alike, emphasizing that bridging gaps in the hidden middle and blue economies is essential for equitable, sustainable food systems transformation.

6. Session objectives

To demonstrate how integrated, systems-based approaches – through public-private partnerships in food processing, agro-food parks and aquaculture – can unlock investment, strengthen value chain linkages between industry, smallholder farmers, and SMEs, and drive inclusive and sustainable food systems transformation.

7. Link to UNFSS+4 objectives

a. Reflecting on progress

The session reflects on progress by showcasing successful models like Ethiopia's agro-food parks, proving the power of public-private partnerships. Speakers will share lessons on what has worked and where gaps remain, especially in financing the hidden middle and scaling seaweed aquaculture. By tracking commitments since the 2021 Food Systems Summit and assessing persistent barriers, the dialogue provides evidence-based insights to inform future policies and investments. This reflection ensures that food systems transformation efforts build on practical experience and accelerate impact toward the SDGs.

b. Partnerships and Tracking Commitments

This session will highlight existing Government – UN – Private Sector partnerships to inspire new opportunities.

c. Unlocking finance and Increasing Investment

The session addresses unlocking finance by showcasing successful public and private investment models like Ethiopia's integrated agro-food parks. It highlights how de-risking tools – such as concessional finance and guarantees – can lower barriers for investors. By emphasizing underfinanced areas like the hidden middle of value chains and seaweed aquaculture, the session presents the case for scaling investment. Through dialogue among governments, private sector leaders, and financial institutions, it fosters partnerships and path forward to mobilize funding for inclusive food systems transformation.

8. Key messages

- Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are key enablers for scaling investment into smallholder-inclusive food systems – lowering risk, crowding in private capital, and creating shared value across the value chain.
- Developing sustainable and equitable food supply chains involves multifaceted approaches within supply chains, for which a stronger focus on the “hidden middle” of food systems can be an enabler of accelerated transformation.
- IAFPs and seaweed aquaculture offer replicable, high-impact models that integrate infrastructure, services, and market linkage.
- There is a strong business case for investment, but scaling requires targeted de-risking, policy support, and coordinated action.
- Ecosystem – Delivering value to society, supporting inclusion, women and young entrepreneurs - livelihoods

9. Session Format

A moderated panel of government, private sector, finance, academia and UN representatives will explore investment models, the missing middle, enabling policies, and scaling opportunities. Audience interaction through Q&A will engage participants. The session concludes with closing reflections and a call to action to mobilize partnerships and finance ahead of UNGA80.

10. Guiding Questions for Speakers

Name	Affiliation/Title	Guiding Question(s)
Opening speaker – Mr. Gunther Beger	UNIDO Managing Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From UNIDO’s global perspective, what makes IAFPs and seaweed particularly timely and relevant models for food systems transformation? • How can public-private partnerships in food processing and value chains unlock investment and strengthen connections between industry, smallholder farmers, and SMEs?
UNIDO Representative: Mr. Dejene Tezera	UNIDO Agri-business Development Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are specific lessons from implementing IAFPs in Ethiopia that have enabled strong public-private partnerships?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the main priorities to scale these models across Africa and other regions?
Private sector actor Ms. Eija HIETAVUO	Tetra Pak, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From private sector perspective, how can private companies best engage in value chain investments, especially in the hidden middle infrastructure? What enabling policies or incentives would help unlock more private sector participation in sustainable food processing?
IFI	TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the role of development finance institutions in de-risking investments in agro-food parks and blue food/seaweed value chains? How can concessional finance and blended capital be better structured to catalyze private investment?
Government representative Ethiopia - H.E. Mr. Melaku ALEBEL	Minister of Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have IAFPs contributed to Ethiopia's industrialization, rural transformation and food systems goals? What further support from international partners and investors is needed to deepen their impact?
Academia representative Mr. VON BRAUN	FAO scientific advisory committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the potential for growth of food processing and SMEs in Africa? What research or data gaps still need to be addressed to inform policy and investment decisions?
Joshua Forte, Founder & CEO, Red Diamond Compost		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your view what is the most critical element missing to solving for the hidden middle? Can you tell us more about your vision or a well-functioning business ecosystem?
Government of Madagascar or Government of France		tbc
Vincent Doumeizel, Senior Advisor & Head of the UN Global Seaweed Coalition		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the top need for scaling up investments and making a harmonized business case? What was achieved at the UN Ocean Conference and why does it matter?

President of Tanzania		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are Tanzania's goals for partnering with the UN and private sector to further advance this integrated land and sea approach?
Closing remarks Assistant Secretary-General Sanda Ojiambo	ASG, UNGC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is your vision for what comes next? How will the UN build momentum at UNGA80 and COP30 to deliver on the outcomes here?

11. Desirable outcome(s)

- Hidden middle: Increased awareness on the critical role of the hidden middle in achieving food systems transformation. The hidden middle supports farmers by providing market access and resources, which boosts productivity and income. This support is vital for building resilient agricultural communities that can withstand climate shocks. Improved connectivity and transport infrastructure, facilitated by investments in the hidden middle, ensure that food can reach markets even during adverse weather conditions.
- IAFP: Enhanced recognition of IAFPs as scalable models. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of how IAFPs offer a practical, replicable pathway to strengthen smallholder and SME participation in value chains and attract private investments.
- IAFP: Increased awareness of policy and financial instruments needed to scale. The discussion will highlight enabling policies, de-risking tools (e.g., concessional finance, guarantees), and technical assistance required to facilitate greater private sector participation in food systems transformation.
- Global Seaweed: Recognition about the potential of seaweed to address global challenges and build a new regenerative aquaculture and associated economic model
- Global Seaweed: Develop the needed financial tools and scientific knowledge to make it happen – build capacity

12. Tentative agenda

I. Opening Segment – High-Level Framing (10 minutes)

Gunther Beger, Director-General, UNIDO

II. Dual Case Spotlight – Land & Sea Models (10 minutes)

“From Land to Sea” Conversation: Guided conversation by moderator, highlighting similarities, challenges, and opportunities.

- **Mr. Hennie Heymans, CEO, Sub Saharan Africa, DHL Express**

3. Panel Discussion – Enabling Scale Through Partnerships (40 minutes – roughly 5 minutes each)

- **Moderator: Terry Tamminen – AltaSea (tbc)**

Moderated Panel with 6-7 speakers:

- **H.E. Mr. Melaku ALEBEL**, Minister of Industry, Ethiopia
- *Minister, Government of Madagascar or Government of France (tbc)*
- **Private Sector Representative:** Ms. Eija Hietavuo, Vice President, Corporate Affairs, TetraPak
- **SME Representative:** Joshua Forte, Founder & CEO, Red Diamond Compost
- **IFI Representative (tbc)**
- **Dejene Tezera**, Agri-business Development Director, UNIDO – IAFPs as policy tools for agro-industrial development underpinning global food systems transformation
- **Vincent Doumeizel**, Senior Advisor & Head of the UN Global Seaweed Coalition
- Academia representative – Mr Von Braun (tbc)

4. Audience Interaction – Q&A or Digital Polling – roughly 3 questions (15 minutes)

- Live questions from audience

5. Closing Remarks (5 minutes)

- President, United Republic of Tanzania (tbc)

6. Closing Reflections and Call to Action (5 minutes)

Assistant Secretary-General, Sanda Ojiambo, United Nations Global Compact

- Summary of takeaways, common themes and investment messages (moderator)
- Strategic framing for UNGA80 and future collaboration

13. Proposed speakers

Name	Affiliation/Title	Country/Region	Gender	Contact Information (email/phone /whatsapp)
Samia Suluhu Hassan	President of the United Republic of Tanzania	Tanzania, Africa	F	
Opening speaker – Mr, Gunther Beger	UNIDO Managing Director	Austria, Europe	M	
Mr. Hennie Heymans	CEO, Sub Saharan Africa, DHL Express	Africa Region	M	
UNIDO Representative: Mr. Dejene Tezera	UNIDO Agri-business Development Director	Ethiopia , Africa	M	
Private sector actor Ms. Eija HIETAVUO	Tetra Pak, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer	Finland, Europe	F	
International Finance Institution				
Government representative Ethiopia - H.E. Mr. Melaku ALEBEL	Minister of Industry	Ethiopia , Africa		
Joshua Forte	Founder & CEO, Red Diamond Compost	Barbados, Caribbean	M	
Academia representative Mr. VON BRAUN	FAO scientific advisory committee	Germany, Europe	M	
Government of Madagascar or Government of France	tbc	tbc		
Vincent Doumeizel,	Senior Advisor, UN Global Seaweed Coalition	France, Europe	M	

Sanda Ojiambo	Assistant Secretary-General	Global, Kenya	F	
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Additional Links/Documents

14. Contact Information for the Sessions Leads and Co-Leads

Session Lead:	Focal point Name(s)
UN Global Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gabriel Torres – Partnership Officer • Vincent Doumeizel – Senior Advisor, Ocean and Head of the Global Seaweed Coalition
Session Co-Lead 1: UNIDO	Focal point Name(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ali Badarneh – Chief, UNIDO Food Security and Food Systems Unit • Andrew Goodwin – Project Officer, Rural Development, Agro-industries and Industrial Parks Unit • Aleksa Mirkovic – Project Administrator, Food Security and Food Systems Unit