

## CFS51 side-event

### SE24: “Learnings from cross-sectoral sustainability assessments: From multinational corporations to regional initiatives in West and Central Africa”

Date, time & location	Thursday, 26 October, between 8:30 and 9:45 (CET) - Iran room
Organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>World Benchmarking Alliance</b> (Viktoria de Bourbon de Parme and Rayan Kassem)</li><li>• <b>Proforest</b> (Ali Merifield and Sophie Higman)</li><li>• <b>World Business Council for Sustainable Development</b> (Emeline Fellus and Paul Schuilwerve)</li></ul>

#### Short description

This session featured the launch of the World Benchmarking Alliance’s 2023 Food and Agriculture Benchmark assessing the world’s 350 most influential food and agriculture companies as well as introducing Proforest’s Africa Sustainable Commodity Initiative (ASCI) as a functional multistakeholder platform for responsible commodity agriculture in Central and West Africa, including the Congo Basin. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development shared their work on Food and Nutrition Security and highlighted the role of corporate commitment in closing the accountability gap. With the aim of closing the corporate accountability gap, the session dived deep into how the private sector can play a role in farmers’ livelihoods and the health of people and the planet. The link was made on how using the tools and instruments available for assessing private-sector performance can drive action and accountability.

#### Objectives of the session

- Present findings from the World Benchmarking Alliance’s **2023 Food and Agriculture and Nature Benchmarks** assessing the performance of the world’s 350 most influential companies.
- Share learnings on how to ensure that commodity production brings social benefits to farmers, communities and indigenous people while protecting forests and environment via introducing the **Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative**.
- Share key findings and best practices along the value chain and in key areas.
- Discuss actions needed to be taken by the private sector to close the **corporate accountability gap**.

#### Key messages

- Companies need to ensure adequate social benefits toward small-scale producers, indigenous communities and women along their commodity supply chains.
- The vast majority of companies fail to recognize their responsibility to protect the planet and equitably feed the world.

#### Conclusion

The findings from the World Benchmarking Alliance's 2023 Food and Agriculture Benchmark highlight that the private sector is not on track to transforming our food system into a healthier, sustainable, and equitable food system. The Access To Nutrition Initiative's indexes findings reiterates that nutrition is not being prioritized by companies when it comes to healthier products and responsible marketing. The African Sustainable Commodities Initiative shows that a human rights approach must follow a just transition based on local community guidelines. With only a minority of companies taking progressive action whilst the state of global food security and nutrition is alarming, the need for corporate accountability becomes more prominent. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development highlights the triple challenge in food security and nutrition. Positive behaviour is visible among companies and improvement is noticeable from previous years, yet this is still not enough to realize the transformation needed.

The 2030 SDG agenda along with the Paris Agreement indicate the need for urgent action. While some companies show improvement, the majority of companies fail to realize their responsibilities. The need to bridge the gap between the laggards and the front runners can only be reinforced by incentives and accountability. Legislation plays a key role in holding companies accountable. Frameworks need to be based on existing policy recommendations and instruments from a multitude of stakeholders. The transformation of our food system cannot be realized by governments alone, companies need to be part of the discussions and spaces such as CFS are an opportunity to effective communication with the private sector.

#### **Appendix – Speaker notes**

Launch of the 2023 Food and Agriculture and Nature Benchmarks assessing the world's 350 most influential companies.

**Viktoria de Bourbon de Parme**, Food Transformation Lead - World Benchmarking Alliance

- The findings from the 2023 Food and Agriculture Benchmark revealed that:
  - o 35% of the 350 most influential companies score 10/100 or lower and thus fail to recognize their role and impact on sustainable food systems.
  - o On small-scale producers: 27% of companies support farmer's income stability through procurement and pricing practices. However, 4% only identify living income benchmarks or calculate living income gaps.
  - o On consumer nutrition and health: Companies score weakest on the nutrition measurement area compared to environment, social, and governance. 18% of consumer-facing companies share how they are reformulating products to improve their nutritional quality by reducing salt, sugar, and fats with 5 companies only setting targets to increase sales from healthy foods. Global restaurant chains and food services are the furthest behind.
  - o On climate action: We can see a doubling of companies who are setting scope 3 science-based targets aligned with the 1.5-degree target. The biggest area in need of action by food and agriculture companies is deforestation. We know that we need to end deforestation by 2025 to realize the 2030 target.
  - o On regenerative agriculture: at WBA, the four pillars of assessing companies on regenerative agriculture are soil health (51% of companies adopting practices), improving livelihoods of farmers and fishers (27% have activities), optimizing fertilizer use (9%), and minimizing pesticide use (4% provide quantitative evidence).
  - o On sustainable strategies: More than 50% of companies are having a materiality assessment but only 8% of them are implementing them showing that companies know what they should be doing but not taking enough action to realize them.

Highlights from the Food and Nutrition Security report and corporate commitments

**Paul Schuilwerve**, Senior Advisor, Agriculture and Food: Food Security – World Business Council for Sustainable Development

- There is a concerning picture on meeting SDG2 showing stagnation and regression on a global level.
- WBCSD members; 8 of them are in the top10 of WBA's benchmark. Yet, these are only a few of companies that are need to realize the transformation agenda.
- We have a triple challenge (Nutrition, farmers, and environment) to ensure healthy and nutritious food for the additional 2 billion people we need to feed.
  - o Nutrition: over 800 million people are undernourished, 3 billion do not have access to healthy diets, and 2.5 billion are overweight.
  - o Farmers: 500 million farms are smaller than 2 hectares.
  - o Environment: 1/3 of food is lost or wasted, 50% of ag. Lands are degraded, and 70% of freshwater is used for ag.
- Area where food insecurity is highest: Sub-Saharan Africa. 60% of the expected 2 billion increase in people will be in this area by 2050.
- The question is can we expect to have 1.2 bn hungry on the planet, of which 500 million in Africa?
- Some of the drivers of food insecurity in Africa include a colonial legacy focus, limited investment in agriculture, rapid population increase and climate challenges.
- The role of the private sector comes in making production and supply chains more efficient, innovating in scalable technology, and creating business market opportunities. This is not a challenge that can be handled by the PS alone.
- The risk on the private sector can be minimizing by collaboration.
- Zero Hunger Private Sector Pledge: Calling on companies from all sizes from across the world to join the movement to end hunger. Currently there are 575 million USD pledged by 50 companies in 48 countries. However, only 7 companies are targeting high priority countries. The first accountability report will be published in November 2023.

Introducing the Africa Sustainable Commodity Initiative (ASCI) as a functional multistakeholder

- Proforest calls for a just transition to responsible production.
- The Africa Sustainable Commodities Initiative puts African countries at the forefront of defining a single set of

<p>platform for responsible commodity agriculture in Central and West Africa.</p> <p><b>Sophie Higman</b>, Director of Programmes - Proforest</p>	<p>principles for the responsible production of all agricultural commodities that protect people, nature and climate (Signed by 10 countries from West Africa at COP27)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The ASCI principles signed by the 10 countries at COP27 span across 6 areas; sustainability, governance, accountability, rights of communities, collaboration, and equity.</li> <li>- Proforest has national implementing approaches aiming to support responsible production adhering to the principles.</li> <li>- Companies have a responsibility to contribute to food security.</li> </ul>
<p>Panel discussion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Marije Boomsma</b> - Director, Strategic Alliances &amp; External Affairs, Access to Nutrition Initiative</li> <li>2. <b>Afua Prempeh</b>, Principal Project Manager, Proforest Africa, Ghana</li> </ol>	<p>Marije:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ATNI agrees with the key message of WBA that companies are not prioritizing health or nutrition.</li> <li>- We see companies adopting product portfolio measures and commitments not to market unhealthy products to children below the age of 16. The 2021 index shows that 30% of companies can be called healthy and only 9% of the products can be called healthy to be marketed to children.</li> <li>- The role of companies must be alleviated during events such as CFS to be part of the solution.</li> </ul> <p>Afua:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Just transition can be achieved by collaboration between government and the private sector. An example on this is in Ghana where both stakeholders established the Tree Crop Development Authority which is government-led but private sector driven.</li> </ul>
<p>Closing remarks</p> <p><b>Sylvia Ekra</b>, Deputy Director – UN Food Systems Coordination Hub</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In consolidation of the speaking points by all panellists, five elements can be derived: Frameworks, platforms, government-need, a human rights approach, and a multi-stakeholder approach.</li> <li>- When it comes to frameworks, we need to look at what is already existing. We can then bridge the missing gaps.</li> <li>- We need clarity on how governments and companies can embrace existing guidelines and standards. We need this alignment to be able to speak the same language.</li> <li>- Governments have to be at the forefront as they are the ones who hold the legislation. Otherwise, we remain at the commitment stage.</li> </ul>