

Post-2015 Agenda and Related Sustainable Development Goals

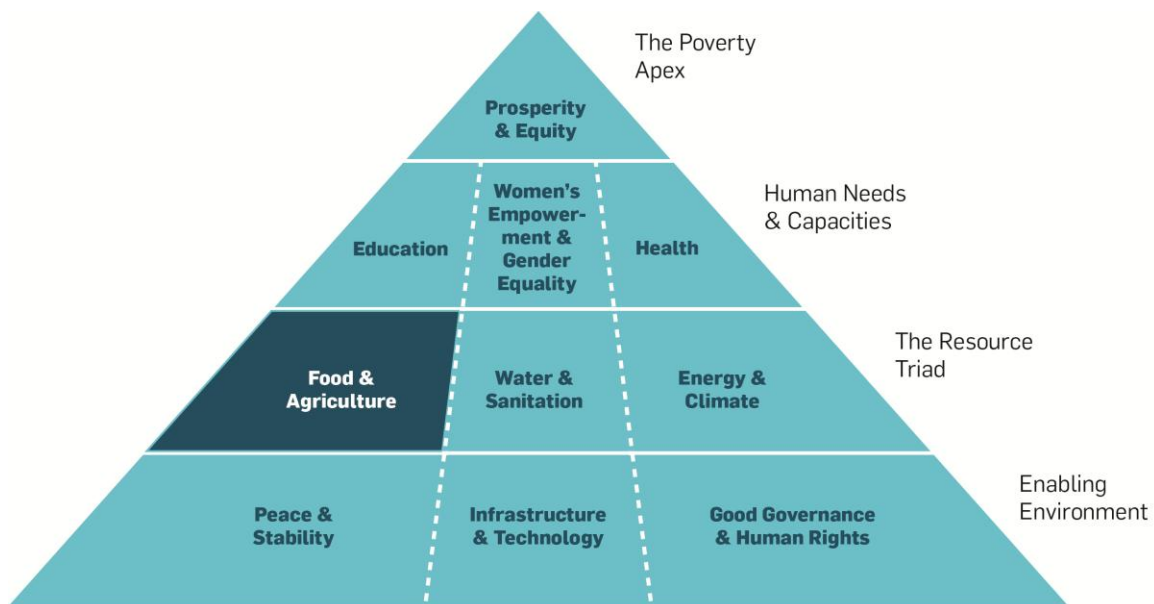
Issue Focus: the Role of Business in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Access Systems

Overview

As governments and policymakers work to develop the Post-2015 agenda, the international community is actively discussing the possible scope of potential sustainable development goals (SDGs). Farming and food occupy a pivotal position in sustainable development, with its three aspects of the social, the economic and the environmental. Enhanced harvests, food processing and distribution will help to eradicate hunger; renovation of the rural sectors of the developing world, where the great bulk of the poor are found, is a key to an advance on prosperity; and current agricultural practices are at once contributing to, and threatened by, climate change.

The United Nations Global Compact has been asked to bring private sector perspectives and action to the Post-2015 Agenda, creating an historic opportunity to scale up and align business contributions to United Nations priorities. The overlap between public and private interest in sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear, and a plan for Post-2015 will require an unprecedented level of interplay between business, governments, civil societies and other key stakeholders. This public-private convergence and opportunity space is reflected in the Post-2015 Business Engagement Architecture, released at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in September 2013. The Architecture provides a resource and roadmap for how to work with the private sector in the new era.

Related to the Architecture, consultations conducted by the UN Global Compact with thousands of companies and stakeholders revealed that businesses committed to sustainability and ethics are energized by the prospect of a newly articulated set of world priorities—including clear goals and targets. From the input received, the UN Global Compact’s LEAD companies developed a series of recommended goals and priority areas (shown below) that they believe would also empower the private sector to make a substantial contribution in the Post-2015 era.



Source: Global Compact LEAD consultations

LEAD companies selected food and farming critical to achievement of an overall sustainable development agenda. The goal and related targets are articulated as follows:

“Goal 5: Good nutrition for all through sustainable food and agricultural systems, targets include:

- Eradicate calorie-deficient hunger and halt increase of rates of obesity and of malnutrition
- Eliminate stunting of children under two years of age through appropriate micro-nutrients.
- Double the productivity of LDC (least developed country) agriculture.
- Stop and turn back annual increases in greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation resulting from farming and livestock production by 2020.
- Bring down the share of overexploited ocean fish stocks by 20 per cent.
- Reduce amount of food lost through poor storage and waste by one third.”

The purpose of this issue paper is to inform governments and policy makers of the responsible business community’s willingness to be a part of the drive to reach these targets, and to broadly involve the private sector in a campaign which, given its stake in the viability of agricultural and food processing systems, is in their direct interest as well as of universal, global benefit.

Business Platforms for Action and Partnership

A first step toward meeting the food challenge, especially in poor countries where farm productivity is extremely low, is improvement in agricultural operations.

Businesses are taking part through development of new crops and training of farmers in new technologies. Provision of affordable and quality inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, farm equipment, water-conserving irrigation systems, processing or re-cycling of waste to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and bins and containers for fragile crops such as vegetables all play an important role in helping farmers increase the scale of their operations and incomes. There is mutual advantage in integrating geographically and economically isolated, smallholder farmers – many of whom are women - into national, regional and global enterprises and their value chains.

There is a returning trend in many countries to cooperatives for small-scale farmers. Typically acting as business associations for mutual benefit, the more ideal and progressive ones are actually like collectives of social entrepreneurs, with the 'profit-mix' of each individual delivering into a pool for public/communal benefits.

Besides increasing supply, enhanced productivity will also reduce the need to bring additional forests, jungle and wetlands under cultivation, and possibly even return some farmlands to the status of nature preserves.

Positive linkages between agri-business, the public sector and civil society to expand on these contributions are being fostered through issue platforms such as the Food and Agriculture Business Principles (FAB Principles), now being drafted by the Global Compact in coordination with UN agencies and civil society groups. The FAB Principles address the impact of agriculture on natural environments, on farm communities, on developing economies, on equal access of women to productive resources, and as to the ultimate benefit to consumers. They are taking on issues such as the obligation of investors in large-scale farm plots – representing either state-owned or private enterprises – to respect local property rights and customs.

An important example of partnerships between national governments and agricultural enterprises large and small is the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, emerging from the 2009 G8 Summit at L'Aquila, Italy.

Farming is the starting point of a production-distribution-consumption process that concludes with access to food. Companies that process, distribute and sell food products first of all are charged to “do no harm” by ensuring the safety of their products, especially those marketed to mothers, children and infants. Increasingly, they are being challenged to upgrade nutritional value and help consumers avoid obesity, diabetes and chronic diseases.

Business is a contributing partner in a UN- and government-led initiative called Scaling Up Nutrition, or SUN. The SUN Business Network, launched at the Davos World Economic Forum in 2014, harnesses business expertise and applies its strengths and comparative advantages to improved nutrition, including through product development, infrastructure systems, distribution channels, research and innovation, and agriculture.

Key Driver: Public Policy and Enabling Incentives

In order to unlock the full potential of the private sector it will be critical to establish proper and effective enabling frameworks and incentives in terms of public policy. Some steps recommended for the achievement of an adequately nourished global society:

- Establish or strengthen extension services farmers.
- Build infrastructure like roads, railway lines, ports and storage facilities that will connect farmers, who sometimes cannot market outside of their own villages, to local, national, regional and global markets, as well as regulations that support their access to markets.
- Put in place tax and regulatory provisions to support investment in agriculture, and secure property rights of smallholder or landless farmers as well as local SMEs and multinationals.
- Identify or set aside plots where large-scale farming can be developed, while respecting rights and needs of local farm, fishing, forestry and pastoral communities.
- Promote regulation to protect against human trafficking, forced and child labour and, in the case of employing firms, substandard wages and working conditions..
- Discourage farm production subsidies that place poor country farmers at a disadvantage, and arbitrary or sudden crop export controls that induce price volatility and spikes in hunger rates

Accountability

In recent years, increasing numbers of companies are reinforcing sustainability efforts with public commitments in relation to accountability, responsibility, and transparency. To build trust and be considered a credible partner in the Post-2015 era, companies should be – and increasingly are – transparent about not only their social and environmental impacts, but as well how economic practices create or deplete value for society, and what they are doing to improve their performance.

Participants of the UN Global Compact have made public commitments to the Global Compact’s ten principles and are required to report annually on their sustainability efforts through a Communication on Progress (COP) report.

Generally speaking, the UN Global Compact organizes its companies into three categories based on the level of COPs submitted. These levels – Learner, Active and Advanced – allow the UN Global Compact to encourage and challenge participants to use more sophisticated methodology and release more detailed

COPs. Companies are increasingly rising to the challenge to report in a more advanced, detailed and transparent manner. This sort of accountability is crucial in instilling confidence in all stakeholders that companies are truly making meaningful progress towards global sustainability.

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April 2014