

Contribution by Viktoria de Bourbon de Parme, World Benchmarking Alliance

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

I would like to thank the Committee on World Food Security for inviting the World Benchmarking Alliance to speak on the importance of Financing for Development.

When speaking on behalf of the World Benchmarking Alliance, I am actually representing not only the almost 100 employees of our own organisation, but also over 350 multistakeholder organisations that are a part of our Alliance and the work done by countless initiatives including the CFS to find agreement on standards, frameworks and guidelines for sustainable food systems transformation.

This alignment in expectations is important so we can hold each other accountable for their delivery. However, since the launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we have invited the private sector to contribute but don't have an independent mechanism to measure the progress that is being made or the lagging therefore.

That is the purpose of the Food and Agriculture Benchmark. In that benchmark we have assessed 350 food and agriculture companies' contribution to sustainable food systems transformation. The metrics we use are internationally agreed standards including the CFS RAI Principles.

As we all know, finding international agreement is one matter. Implementing them, is an entire different one. That is why I advocate for improved monitoring of the actions that are being taken to realize more healthy, sustainable and equitable food systems. Monitoring is relevant for governments, multilateral organisations, and also the private sector.

We cannot realize the global challenges ahead of us without the private sector's contribution. Having lived in Rome for my previous profession I know that the CFS is one of the most diverse multistakeholder platforms, opening its doors widely also to the private sector, but I think we can do better. Even if companies are not performing up to standard, we have to invite them to the table, to make them take responsibility.

A benchmark like ours can be used to inform discussions, but should never be a reason to shut the door. I say this despite the private sector overall scoring very poorly on the Food and Agriculture Benchmark.

For example if we look at climate mitigation and reducing direct emissions under scope 1 and scope 2, from the 350 companies that we have assessed, ranging from agriculture input companies, to

commodity traders, food and beverage manufacturers and retailers only 26 companies out of the 350 have set emissions reduction targets which are aligned with the 1.5-degree trajectory as recommended by the Paris Agreement. While over half of the companies assessed - 188 of them - have published no target at all. With more than ¼ of the world's greenhouse gas emissions stemming from activities associated with agriculture, forestry, and land-use change, this is a very unsettling finding. But this unsettling outcome will not change unless we invite the private sector to meetings like these and hold them accountable.

I encourage you all to seek these public-private collaborations. Not because they are easy but because they are necessary. Use the data that is out there to inform your discussions. The World Benchmarking Alliance is a non-profit organisation, thus all the findings of the Food and Agriculture Benchmark, as well as the methodology and scoring we used is publicly available.

Moreover, we encourage others to use the methodology for free, to make a national assessment of their private sector. We, personally, have only capacity to focus on these 350 big multinationals, but others can complement this work and feed in the results to the National Food Systems Pathways. And through those National Pathways it can also paint a picture of the level of investments that are going into Food Systems Transformation.

In conclusion, I want to encourage you to seek collaboration, even with the worst performing companies. Seek dialogue, seek participation, point them to their peers that are ahead of them and encourage action. Because it is only through collaborative action that we can realize change at the scale and the speed required to tackle these massive global challenges, and realize sustainable food systems, which leave no one behind and stay within planetary boundaries.

Thank you.

Question 1: Can you share more relevant results of the Food and Agriculture Benchmark?

We have many more data points. All of which are publicly available. Not just on environmental metrics like soil health, water use, and deforestation but also on nutritional elements like improving the accessibility and affordability of healthy foods, improving food safety, and also on ensuring equitability in the supply chain by improving the resilience of farmers and fisherman, as well as eliminating child and forced labour. While the majority of companies is not performing up to standard, for almost each topic you can find at least one company that is demonstrating a leading practice. We should build on that and use those examples to inspire other companies to step up their efforts.

Question 2: How can the Food and Agriculture Benchmark help in holding the private sector accountable for sustainable food systems transformation?

The benchmark assesses companies from across the value chain on a very broad set of metrics. It paints a holistic picture and it is not based on voluntary participation. With that, it provides an independent monitoring mechanism which can be used to hold the private sector accountable for their action on sustainable food systems transformation. An example of such integrated monitoring can be found in the G7 Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative, that was presented here at CFS today and where companies have pledged to improve their performance as measured by the World Benchmarking Alliance's Food and Agriculture Benchmark.