



United Nations Division for Sustainable Development Goals
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)

*An expert group meeting in preparation for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2018:
Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*

Thursday 3 – Friday 4 May 2018
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Conference Room 9

Background Note

Session 6: SCP and Food Loss and Waste

Background

The global food system is under pressure to produce more food to feed growing and rapidly urbanizing populations with changing dietary habits. These increases in food production must draw on scarce natural resources such as land and water as well as energy requirements to produce, process and transport food. Added to these pressures is the vulnerability of the food system to climate change impacts and the threat of pest and disease infestations.

High levels of food losses and waste (FLW), resulting from inefficiencies in the food system, contribute to pressures on the food system, and significantly impact the environment, both from the use of scarce natural resources for producing food that will never be consumed, and from the local and global environmental impacts of dumping food in landfills that result in the emission of greenhouse gases.

FLW takes place at all steps of the food supply chain from production to consumption. Food losses are largely unintentional and result from insufficient access to technologies and to energy, poor infrastructure and logistics, and inadequate market access, as well as knowledge and managerial limitations of supply chain actors.

Food waste predominates at the retailer and consumer levels of the supply chain and is distinct from food losses because it is generated by different drivers. Food waste is higher in developed countries as compared to developing countries. And solutions required to address food waste differ from those required to address food losses.

FLW is addressed in the context of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12, which seeks to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.” Target 12.3 of this goal seeks to “halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along the production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses, by 2030”.



The reduction of FLW is an essential outcome of sustainable food value chains, which are the core of sustainable food systems. Tackling FLW requires a sound understanding of its underlying causes – which are technical, behavioural and, in particular, economic.

Several efforts and interventions designed to tackle FLW are being implemented by a broad spectrum of stakeholders originating from the public and private sectors, international development agencies, civil society, academia and research. These interventions include research to identify the causes and to recommend solutions to the problems; target-setting, the development of policies, frameworks and the enactment of legislation, the use of market-based instruments (taxes, incentives and subsidy schemes) investment in infrastructure as well as the implementation of global, regional and national campaigns and education to promote awareness and advocacy on the issues.

Challenges related to FLW prevention and reduction range from recognition that food systems are impacted by the attitudes and behaviours of supply chain actors – including producers, agribusinesses and consumers – measurement methodologies, data collection, behavioural change and the policy environment, all of which can have direct and indirect impacts on FLW in food systems.

The lack of statistical data on FLW, poses a major challenge in many countries. Measurement and data are critically important to support sharing of good practices, drive improvement and focus resources to address the challenges. More and better statistical data covering where and how food losses and waste occur is required to better inform policy development and investments.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and UN Environment, both custodian agencies of the SDG 12.3 indicator, have proposed the split of target 12.3 into two stages, the first of which is focused on the “*reduction of losses along the food production and supply chains*” (*supply oriented*) and the second to measure “*halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level*” (*demand oriented*). The Global Food Loss Index (GFLI) and the Food Waste Index (FW) will be developed in accordance with these two distinctions. This simplification will help focus data collection efforts and help focus policy options.

The diversity and complexity of the issues required to tackle FLW reduction, calls for more and better coordinated approaches. New ideas and new ways of doing business are needed. Innovative partnerships, including public-private partnerships and approaches that integrate the range of stakeholders and networks working on the issues, are required to mobilize additional technical, political and financial support to addressing the issues in a more coordinated way. Public sector entities have a critical role to play in creating an enabling environment through the provision of infrastructure, policy support, legislation, regulation and research that is conducive to innovation and action by the private sector.



The session will take stock of progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), target 12.3. Challenges and bottlenecks will be outlined and actions toward developing more coordinated approaches toward meeting the Goal will be discussed.

Questions

Guiding questions to frame the discussion:

- Where and how is progress being made toward addressing SDG 12.3?
- What are the current challenges and what are likely future challenges?
- How can better collaboration be fostered to enhance action toward achieving target 12.3?