



# The Pathway to Zero Hunger Requires Food Loss Reduction: Reflections from UNGA

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In late September, the world gathered in New York for the 72<sup>nd</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Although most attention focused on urgent crises around the world, there were also several sessions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030. The Rockefeller Foundation, WFP, IFAD and FAO co-organized a high-level event themed “Championing SDG 12 and the Pathway to Zero Hunger<sup>[1]</sup>”, alongside others championing food-related SDGs.

Altogether, they highlighted the challenge of global food loss and waste, and the amount of work required to achieve Zero Hunger. We know that global food systems produce enough food to feed the world’s 7.5 billion people, but however, hunger is again on the rise. Around 800 million people are underfed, and a third of food produced every year—or 1.3 billion tons— is lost. This translates into a

financial loss of close to \$1 trillion, and a nutritional loss of 24% of the total calories produced worldwide. Globally, the total area of land equivalent to China is used to produce food that is never consumed.

Given these statistics, one might wonder if any progress has been made toward reducing food loss and waste. Also, if the SDGs related to food, nutrition, and sustainable consumption are helping to trigger real change and action. The answer is “yes’ – there is growing momentum to achieve SDG 12, but then achieving Zero Hunger by 2030 requires that no more food is lost or wasted. A wide range of actors are already engaged in activities to realize this change. Here are some reflections:

**Global progress is being seen as the international community translating ambitious targets**

**into action.** In its second annual progress report, Champions 12.3 <<https://champions123.org>> highlight that both governments and businesses are making progress—albeit at different speeds—towards clear targets, measuring progress, and action on reducing food waste, in consumption and the retail sector. Nearly 60% of the world’s largest companies by revenue have set specific targets on this issue, even though countries representing only 28% of the global population have done so.

There are more ambitious cases, such as the African Union (AU), whose Heads of State have committed to halving food loss and waste by 2025. This is one of seven commitments they aim to achieve, five years before the global deadline, through the Malabo Declaration.

While global targets are being localized for national and regional context, **we also need to invest in measurement and data reporting.** These are critical in pinpointing successes and challenges, sharing best practices, and solving for gaps. Only a few companies, and countries representing only 7% of the global population are measuring and reporting on progress towards meeting food loss and waste targets. More effort is needed, in addition to engaging the tech industry for innovative solutions for data collection and reporting.

**Action matters, and businesses are using their influence and reach to mitigate food loss and**

**waste.** The private sector is a vital partner if the global community is to achieve the SDGs. When companies like the Consumer Goods Forum, Mars, Tesco, IKEA, and the Global Agri-business Alliance take action, it makes progress possible. The Consumer Goods Forum — a collaboration of 400 companies across 70 countries— has committed to reduce food waste at the retail level by 50%, and to simplify food labels by standardizing food date labels to end consumers’ confusion. Mars Inc. is investing \$1 billion to address environmental and social challenges through its business model, in part through new partnerships e.g. with IFAD.

# *Zero tolerance for food loss and waste is not only right but also economically sensible.*

Tesco, the only company in the UK that measures and publishes audited data on food waste at the retail level, has invited 20 of its largest suppliers — with business amounting to \$22 billion — to commit to using standard targets and metrics to reduce food loss in their supply chains. Tesco is also re-distributing much of the 45,000 tons of food that is currently going to waste at the retail level, despite being fit for human consumption. IKEA is working with its 400 restaurants in 48 markets, which serve 650 million guests annually, to reduce food waste by half, and engage 18,500 employees to act soon. Finally, the Agri-Business Alliance — a coalition of 48 private sector companies — announced a member-wide voluntary commitment to reduce food and non-food agricultural products' loss by 50%.

Across the world, governments are also addressing this issue. The United Arab Emirates has launched a comprehensive food diversifying program, which includes education, re-distribution, and donation of food about to expire and be confiscated. Tanzania is developing a post-harvest management strategy, Uganda has requested the World Food Program to design a program to prevent food loss among 2.5 million rural households by 2025. Other numerous initiatives by regional and international organizations and groups include WFP's Farm to Markets Alliance <<https://www.growafrica.com/groups/farm-market-alliance>> , FAO's new metrics system that is responding to 36 governments, IFAD's \$443 million investment for upgrading post-harvest infrastructure, Feeding India <<https://www.feedingindia.org/>> is working with a network of 7,500 volunteers in 55 cities that 'rescue' and re-distribute food. The philanthropic world, recognizing the interconnected nature of food loss vis-a-vis nutrition to maternal and child health, is stepping up e.g. the Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise <<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/yieldwise/>> Initiative.

Zero tolerance for food loss and waste is not only right but also economically sensible. Champions 12.3 estimates that for every dollar invested in food loss and waste prevention, \$14 is generated in return. Yet besides economic, there is a moral imperative for the world to achieve Zero Hunger.

**Hunger, together with food loss and waste, are human-made problems, and if not addressed, their costs to our societies will only grow.**

Everyone has a role to play. Solving this challenge requires us to forge new partnerships and alliances. By continuing conversations with existing and new actors, and demonstrating change, we can spread the word and change behavior.

[1] The event was co-organized by a unique coalition of partners: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Champions 12.3, and the G20 German Presidency.

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