

**APPROVED**

## **International Agri-Food Network Working Paper**

### **Concepts for Private Sector Modalities**

Food and Agriculture have never been more important in the global agenda. With rising malnutrition and poverty, climate challenges, social inequities, and the primacy of food security, everyone is needed to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 4 Betters identified by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Business grows, stores, processes, retails, and delivers most of the world's food. Understanding FAO priorities, aligning with them, bringing practical expertise and experience will help to advance the global goals.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has clearly acknowledged that the private sector is a key contributor to the reduction of food insecurity, malnutrition, and rural poverty. Its constituents, including farmers, agribusinesses, and cooperatives, make vital contributions to nearly every dimension of the FAO's mission, mandate, and activities. This vision is set forth in the [2021-2025 FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement](#) (Strategy) aimed at strengthening strategic engagement with the private sector towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and welcomed by the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN).

We applaud FAO for this achievement, which was undoubtedly a daunting task, considering the need to justify the vital need of engaging with the private sector. An exceptional level of collaboration between all actors is necessary to develop initiatives that can transform agricultural production and meet future food, nutrition, and environmental demands and this comes with related challenges. Through continued communication by FAO to the wider community and stakeholders of the importance of engaging with the private sector, IAFN is hopeful that the strategy will be successful in supporting the FAO Strategic Framework for the transformation of the agri-food sector and the achievement of the SDGs.

It is encouraging to see engagement and collaboration with the private sector from a wider perspective, and not restricted to partnerships. Partnerships is simply one mode of interacting with FAO that requires significant steps and should not pre-condition other types of private sector participation.

We fully respect those discussions on how the private sector engages within FAO is firmly within the purview of the FAO Management and Member States and look forward to understanding the consensus reached. However, in the spirit of supporting the implementation of the new private sector strategy, IAFN shares the following ideas to improve modalities of private sector participation, laying the groundwork for more fruitful future engagement. That said, greater clarity, consistency, and transparency would be beneficial regarding the means and capacities by which private sector stakeholders are able to engage with FAO processes. In fact, many meetings at FAO still lack normalized procedures for private sector involvement.

## **1. Private sector participation in FAO processes should be self-organized**

- Just as in other UN bodies, business groups self-organize, negotiate positions, and select representatives independently.
- This will also allow each individual private sector stakeholder to engage in different FAO processes in a manner that is commensurate with their level of interest, knowledge of the issues, and eventual budgetary constraints.
- There are many examples of businesses successfully self-organizing to contribute to global multi-lateral processes which may be used as a template.

## **2. Meeting registration processes should be standardized**

- The FAO currently employs a wide variety of standards and procedures for meeting registration, which vary according to organizer and location. This imposes unnecessary logistical burdens on all involved.
- The UN context provides several suitable models from which a standardized set of registration modalities could be adapted, including the registration procedures of meetings held under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

## **3. A clear and transparent process for accreditation to the FAO should be laid out**

- Although a great many industry and agriculture associations were granted the status of accredited bodies to the FAO in the 1960s and 1970s, there are currently no clear and transparent modalities for private sector stakeholders to apply for that status.
- A well functioning accreditation system would streamline many logistical hurdles, for example by facilitating registration for meetings and workshops and external consultations.
- It is assumed accredited status would apply to industry associations or bodies, not individual companies.

## **4. A method should be put in place to facilitate the participation of non-aligned businesses, i.e., unassociated, individual businesses.**

- There must be a method for businesses unaffiliated with accredited organizations, to participate, for example through the designation of a private sector focal point or mechanism.
- This will help ensure that the voices of all those with relevant expertise, of any size and from any part of the value-chain, will be heard.

## **5. Private sector participation in FAO-hosted workshops and symposia should be supported**

- Private sector engagement in knowledge sharing events should be encouraged by guaranteeing slots for business participants. The exact number of slots will vary according to the size of the event, but a suggested threshold for larger events could be either 40 slots, or half of the non-state actors, whichever is larger.

- If speaking panels will include non-states actors, at least one of them should be a representative of the private sector, to ensure that discussions are balanced and inclusive.
- The organizing bodies of these events should include private sector representation where possible, and where not, modalities for consultation and outreach to non-state actors (including businesses) should be put in place.
- During the events themselves, the modalities for taking the floor and making interventions should be clarified and made explicit to all parties, to ensure that all stakeholders are able to participate adequately.
- Business representatives should elect representatives to sit on co-ordinating bodies.

**6. The modalities for private sector engagement with meetings of the governing bodies of the FAO, including the Committee on Agriculture and the FAO Conference, should be clarified**

- In line with point 4 above, the application process for non-state actors to attend should be formalized and standardized. This includes the application process for side events.
- The criteria for non-state actors to be able to apply to attend as observers should be made clearer and be announced in a timely fashion. It is expected that this would be observer status only with no voting rights.
- Modalities should be developed to allow private sector participants to access FAO facilities during these meetings, for example booking meeting rooms. This could be done through the establishment of an informal “friends of the private sector” members group.