



Transforming food systems with small-scale producers

Insights Report

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Executive summary

Food systems contribute to economic prosperity and human and planetary health. At the same time, over 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, and 2.3 billion people are moderately or severely food insecure. Smallholder farmers produce one-third of the world's food but often live in poverty on less than USD 2 a day. Additionally, the seafood sector has a key role to play in the global food system transformation. Some 3.3 billion people rely on seafood for 20% of their animal protein as well as essential micronutrients, and 800 million people depend on fisheries and aquaculture for their livelihoods, most of which are in the Global South. According to the study 'Illuminating Hidden Harvests', more than 94% of the fishers and fish workers engaged in capture fisheries globally are employed in small-scale fisheries. However, data and information on small-scale fisheries are limited and fragmented.

Small-scale farmers and fishers are catalytic to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) two (zero hunger) and contribute to ten more SDGs including SDG 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16. One of the objectives of the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) is to ensure that multinational companies that source from small-scale producers who are often left out of business strategies understand their critical role in and responsibility for ensuring strategic engagement with and a positive impact on these producers' livelihoods and thereby equitable and sustainable food systems. Research shows that if we move towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns, we could feed over 10 billion people while staying within planetary boundaries.

WBA's data shows that 96 of the 350 companies assessed by the Food and Agriculture Benchmark, which have a total revenue of more than USD 3 trillion, have activities and/or commitments involving 75 million small-scale producers (farmers and fishers) in their supply chain. These companies source at least 30 different food commodities from small-scale producers based in 40 low- and middle-income countries. To ensure supply chain security, it is necessary for farming and fishing to be economically viable so that farmers and fishers continue to produce quality products that meet company specifications and consumer preferences. However, 64% of companies do not disclose activities to assess and support farmers' or fishers' living income, indicating a need for more corporate action and accountability towards small-scale producers.

This Insights Report on transforming food systems with small-scale producers at the centre shows the existing link between small-scale farmers and fishers and the 350 companies assessed in the Food and Agriculture Benchmark. In total, WBA aims to assess 2,000 of the most influential companies in the world (the SDG2000) on their contribution to SDGs across its benchmarks. Although it is important for companies to understand their supply chains, the report reveals challenges in defining small-scale producers, which would improve reporting and targeted support. It also highlights the obstacles small-scale producers face in accessing global commodity markets. These include geographical isolation, weak infrastructure and information gaps, as most small-scale producers are based in least-developed countries.

However, the report also provides evidence of partnerships and collaborations supporting company engagement and small-scale producers, with a long list of stakeholders involved in



small-scale farming. WBA has an opportunity to bolster this support by providing stakeholders with data for evidence-based decision-making by incorporating small-scale producers in our methodologies and engagement initiatives such as the [WBA Alliance](#), events, Collective Impact Coalitions and the Consultancy Café.

In addition, the report includes feedback from stakeholder consultations on WBA's plans to spotlight small-scale producers. The overall feedback is positive and commends the approach as a timely and necessary response to data gaps between the private sector and small-scale producers. However, stakeholders underline the importance of industry buy-in and a phased approach to addressing priority impact areas to ensure data use and the success of WBA benchmarks.

Further, the report provides an overview of WBA's ongoing impact project. The project is evaluating the impact of food and agriculture companies on small-scale sugarcane producers in Thailand. The analysis of and lessons from the project will inform WBA's Food and Agriculture Benchmark strategy supporting stakeholders such as civil society organisations to ensure a positive impact on affected stakeholders, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Lastly, the report summarises the key takeaways from the [2024 WBA Allies Assembly](#) held in Thailand, where the Food and Agriculture Benchmark team hosted multistakeholder round tables on small-scale producer inclusion and policies. Stakeholders in the sessions discussed the need for trust-building between smallholders and larger organisations, integrating sustainable practices and addressing greenwashing concerns. At the end of the report, we share policy recommendations and the next steps for WBA to ensure small-scale producer inclusion in our research and engagement activities.

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of global trade and economic development, the role of small-scale producers has become increasingly significant. Often operating in rural and under-resourced areas, these producers are the backbone of many economies, particularly in developing countries. They contribute substantially to food security, poverty alleviation and the sustainable use of natural resources. Yet despite their critical role, small-scale producers face numerous challenges that impede their growth and integration into larger markets.

The incidence of global hunger remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. According to the '[State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024](#)', an estimated 713 and 757 million people worldwide experienced hunger in 2023, which represents an increase of 152 million compared to the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving the SDGs by 2030, particularly SDG 2 (zero hunger), presents a formidable challenge. Projections indicate that nearly 600 million people will continue to face hunger by 2030. Small-scale producers play a key role in addressing the hunger crisis.

In recognition of the [UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028](#) on the potential of small-scale primary producers, there has been a growing emphasis on engaging the private sector in fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development. The private sector's involvement



offers many opportunities for these producers, including access to new markets, financial resources and advanced technologies. Moreover, it facilitates the transfer of knowledge and best practices, enhancing productivity and competitiveness. In turn, private sector companies can benefit from small-scale producer engagement through diversification and the production of nutritious food, biodiversity conservation, innovation and social impact.

Despite the potential for win-win collaborations between the private sector and small-scale producers, investment flows towards small-scale producers remain constrained. Scarce resources hinder the implementation of transformative projects that could uplift local communities. Moreover, private sector engagement often gravitates toward better-endowed producers who can meet quality standards and commercial volumes. The poorest fishers and farmers, who need support the most, are not explicitly targeted in these initiatives. Additionally, narrowly targeted interventions miss the opportunity to catalyse inclusive growth, mostly for women and youth, as well as utilise Indigenous knowledge that can and should complement new technology and innovation.

The insights outlined in this report delve into the dynamics of the engagement of the 350 companies assessed by WBA's Food and Agriculture Benchmark with small-scale producers. The report is based on publicly available data collected to complement the data gathered as part of the 2023 benchmarking cycle. It looks at the definitions that the private sector most commonly uses to define small-scale producers, activities targeting small-scale producers and partners with whom the private sector collaborates for these activities. It also provides an overview of commodities sourced from or sold to small-scale producers. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of play and reflects on consultations with various stakeholder groups working closely with small-scale producers. Finally, it offers policy recommendations and outlines WBA's plans going forward.

Transforming food systems with small-scale producers

WBA's [Access to Seeds Index](#), which assessed the efforts of influential seed companies to provide smallholder farmers with quality seeds in low- and middle-income countries, showed that despite seed companies' efforts, the percentage of smallholder farmers reached is still remarkably low. In 2021, 67 leading seed companies assessed in the index estimate reaching only 10-15% of the smallholder farmers in the world. In addition to the problem of accessing good-quality seeds, small-scale producers continue to face challenges related to access to other agricultural inputs, capacity building, markets and finance.

Further, according to the journal article '[Nutrient supply from marine small-scale fisheries](#)', small-scale fishers contributed about 32% of the overall global seafood nutrient supply, 17% of the nutrient supply from animal-sourced foods and 10% of the nutrient supply from all foods. However, WBA's [Seafood Stewardship Index](#), which assessed the 30 most influential companies in the seafood industry in 2023, showed a lack of human rights due diligence and engagement



with the supply chain, negatively impacting the sustainability of the industry and the livelihoods of the small-scale fishers involved.

Increasing the percentage of small-scale producers reached through company activities that aim to enhance inclusion, equity and improved livelihoods will require additional efforts not just by a few industries. These efforts should come from other companies with influence in the food and agriculture value chain, from agricultural inputs (seeds as well as pesticides and fertilisers), agricultural products and commodities, animal protein, food and beverage manufacturers/processors, food retailers, and restaurant and food services.

WBA has an opportunity to continue spotlighting multinational company efforts regarding small-scale farming through the Food and Agriculture Benchmark, which assesses 350 companies across the value chain. Private sector engagement provides a transformative opportunity for small-scale producers. It offers access to markets and technology, financial support, capacity building, adherence to standards and certification requirements, innovation and research, supply chain efficiency as well as advocacy and representation. Private sector involvement empowers producers, boosts productivity and contributes to sustainable food and agriculture systems. These benefits are discussed in more detail below.

- **Access to markets and technology:** Collaborating with private companies provides small-scale producers with direct access to broader markets, allowing them to sell their products more efficiently and at better prices. Additionally, these collaborations often involve the transfer of modern agricultural practices, machinery and innovations that enhance productivity.
- **Financial support and investment:** Private sector investments play a crucial role in funding infrastructure development, purchasing equipment and expanding production capabilities for small-scale producers. Furthermore, companies may offer credit facilities or insurance, which helps to mitigate financial risks associated with farming.
- **Capacity building and training:** Private firms contribute to skills enhancement by offering training in areas such as crop/fishery management, quality control and sustainable practices. This knowledge transfer empowers small-scale producers, especially women and youth, enabling them to make more informed decisions.
- **Quality standards and certification:** Engaging with private buyers encourages adherence to quality standards, which leads to better acceptance in the market. Companies often support producers in gaining certifications that can enhance the value of products. Certifications include ethical and environmental sustainability, organic and fair trade.
- **Innovation and research collaboration:** Partnerships with the private sector foster research and development efforts that address specific challenges faced by small-scale producers. These partnerships also facilitate the introduction of innovative techniques that improve productivity and resilience.
- **Supply chain efficiency:** Private firms play a vital role in optimising supply chains, ensuring timely delivery of produce or catch and reducing post-harvest losses through improved handling, storage and transportation practices.
- **Advocacy and representation:** Working with private entities strengthens the collective bargaining power of small-scale producers and enhances their ability to influence policy changes that favour their interests.



Landscape of influential food and agriculture company engagement with small-scale producers

The current food system is failing millions of people worldwide. Companies in the food and agriculture sector, which is one of the largest sectors in the world, have a responsibility to ensure that the food systems they support are inclusive and sustainable. These multinationals are confronted with a growing number of pressing issues related to sustainable supply chain management. This particularly relates to companies' expansion into developing nations that typically suffer from low levels of regulation, a dearth of financial incentives for environmentally friendly business practices and inadequate transportation infrastructure.

Information on the structure, scope and impacts of food and agriculture companies on supply chains is severely limited, and thus judging the extent of the impacts is difficult. The 2023 Food and Agriculture Benchmark demonstrates the lack of supply chain engagement across the environment, nutrition and social measurement areas, as outlined in the accompanying [Insights Report](#), page 21.

Furthermore, according to a [PNAS study](#) that surveyed 449 publicly listed companies in the food, textile and wood products sectors on their contribution to sustainability through global supply chains, more than 80% of global trade flows through multinational corporations. In addition, one in five jobs is tied to global supply chains. More than 95% of environmental impacts from food and retail companies stem from their supply chains.

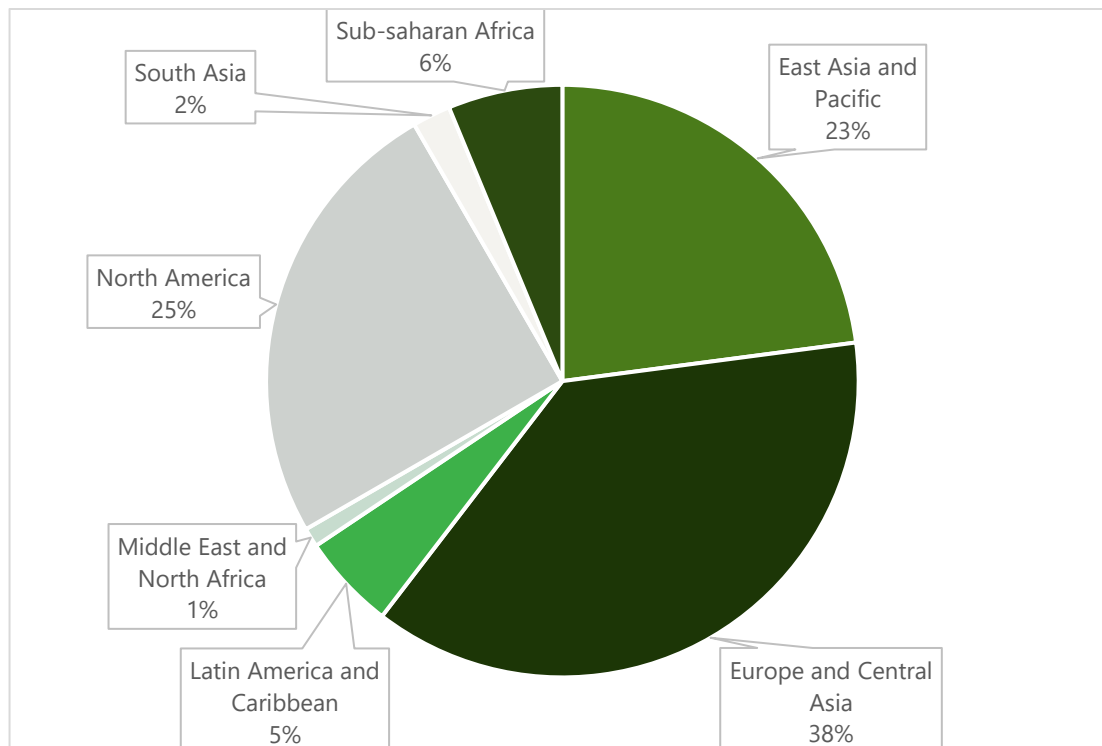
Small-scale producers are key actors in global supply chains across various industries, including agriculture, manufacturing and textiles. Despite their relatively small size, these producers contribute significantly to the production of key raw materials and commodities that are integral to the global economy. WBA's Food and Agriculture Benchmark data shows that 96 companies in the benchmark with a total revenue of more than USD 3 trillion have activities and/or commitments involving small-scale producers in their supply chain. These companies source at least 30 different food commodities, such as coffee, cocoa and palm oil, from around 75 million small-scale producers based in 40 low- and middle-income countries. Most of these companies are publicly listed and headquartered in mainly upper-middle-income countries in Europe and Central Asia, followed by North America, East Asia and the Pacific (Figure 1).

As the world moves towards a more integrated and sustainable economy, the synergy between the private sector and small-scale producers is not just desirable but essential. It is a



partnership that promises to unlock new possibilities, drive innovation and pave the way for a more equitable distribution of the fruits of economic and social progress.

FIGURE 1: HEADQUARTERS LOCATION OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE BENCHMARK COMPANIES TARGETING SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS BY REGION



Definition and characteristics of small-scale producers

Small-scale food producers play an important role in global food systems by promoting food security, rural livelihoods and sustainable agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture. Despite this, there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of small-scale fishers or smallholder farmers. Current definitions often use a variety of criteria, mainly at the national level, to describe small-scale fishers or farmers. These include vessel size and power, gear type, area of operation or land size, agricultural production level and socioeconomic characteristics. Companies also frequently fail to identify and define small-scale producers in their supply chains for a variety of reasons. Among them are the complexity of modern supply chains, the number and variety of stakeholders, intermediaries or middlemen, and the wide range of geographies. The commodities involved make it even more difficult to define small-scale producers precisely.

In spite of the challenges, defining small-scale food producers within supply chains is key for business reporting and serves numerous important functions. It promotes transparency and accountability by identifying the sources of raw materials and the parties involved in production, allowing for better oversight of social and environmental repercussions. This clarity also allows businesses to identify and minimise risks associated with sourcing processes, such as labour conditions, land use, water use, deforestation and biodiversity conservation.

In addition, clear definitions allow for precise monitoring of the social and environmental effects of sourcing activities, which aids in demonstrating progress towards local and global sustainability objectives and commitments. It encourages effective stakeholder interaction, guarantees compliance with reporting standards, and promotes sustainable sourcing and ethical trading principles. This approach strengthens the credibility of environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting, demonstrates a company's commitment to responsible business practices and helps to achieve sustainable development goals.

Zooming in on small-scale fisheries, there is no clear definition of small-scale fishers due to a lack of an agreed cutoff between small-scale and large-scale designations, according to the global study '[Illuminating Hidden Harvests](#)' (IHH). The IHH study shows that most countries have their operational definitions typically based on vessel size and power, gear type or area of operation, which in some cases exclude legitimate small-scale fishers or enable larger-scale vessels to be included as part of the small-scale fleet. The study calls for the need for a working definition of small-scale fisheries to ensure that fisheries management, conservation, trade and market measures support the social and economic development of small-scale fishers.

Similarly, for smallholder farmers, definitions are context specific at the national level, based in most cases on crop type and land availability. For example, only 16 of the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies publicly provide a definition or description of the small-scale farmers with whom they engage. While most companies define small-scale farmers as those who manage relatively small areas of land (less than 2 hectares), other definitions of small-scale producers are context specific and consider factors like crop types, land availability and local practices. For example, in the context of palm oil production, the threshold for small-scale producers varies based on the country and specific guidelines. If no specific threshold is defined in the National Interpretation, the [palm oil production area](#) is considered small scale if it is smaller than or equal to 50 hectares (ha). However, in Indonesia, the threshold size is 20 ha or below, while in Ecuador, it is 75 ha or below according to that country's National Interpretation.

According to the 2022 WBA report '[The role of benchmarking in food and agriculture supply chains](#)', a low proportion of companies define small-scale producers and have difficulties mapping and categorising all of their suppliers, particularly when dealing with a large network of producers spanning various nations and industries. Some may prioritise direct suppliers or key partners in their reporting and engagement efforts, resulting in a lack of defined criteria for small-scale producers. Moreover, specific definitions vary based on local nuances, economic conditions and agricultural practices. Understanding these differences is essential for effective policy formulation and support for small-scale producers in each region.

Commodity trading with small-scale producers

Small-scale producers form the backbone of local and regional food production. Their struggle to connect with global markets due to geographical isolation, weak infrastructure and information gaps is a common theme. On the other side, we have multinational companies deeply entrenched in the food supply chain. These giants source commodities from various regions, processing raw materials into consumer-ready products, and ensuring efficient distribution. Their market power can sway commodity prices and supply dynamics.



A prevalent trait of increased integration into global supply chain networks is commodity dependency. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), a country is considered commodity-dependent when commodities constitute the predominant (60% or more) share of its exports. The 'State of Commodity Dependence Report 2023' highlights that commodity dependence particularly affects least-developed countries. Commodity dependence is predominant in Africa, South America and Oceania, followed by West and Central Asia. While only 12.5% of developed countries were commodity-dependent, 81.2% of landlocked developing countries, 73.9% of least-developed countries, 60.5% of small island developing states and 54.7% of other developing countries were commodity-dependent, as per the report.

Agricultural products accounted for 35.6% of all world commodity exports in 2019–2021. Agricultural commodity trading includes raw agricultural products like grains, coffee, cocoa and spices that traverse a complex global network. This system involves a dynamic interplay between key players such as small-scale producers based in developing countries and multinational food and agriculture companies.

Commodity trade serves as a critical conduit between small-scale producers and global markets. WBA data shows that at least 40 different food commodities (Table 1) are sourced by the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies, with the main sourcing countries being low- and middle-income countries (Figure 2). It is important to note that commodity dependency can have negative implications for countries, particularly for developing countries that are susceptible to shocks affecting the prices and/or quantity of the commodities exported. Any kind of shock to pricing and volumes, depending on the product being produced and the nature of the shock, can have both short-term and long-term repercussions, especially on the livelihoods of small-scale producers.

TABLE 1: COMMODITIES SOURCED BY THE 350 LARGEST FOOD AND AGRICULTURE COMPANIES

Country	Commodity
Australia	Sugar
Bangladesh	Cotton
Bolivia	Quinoa
Brazil	Cocoa, coffee, soyabean, honey, poultry, black pepper, sugar
Cambodia	Palm oil
Cameroon	Cocoa
Colombia	Cassava, coffee, maize, cocoa, palm oil
Costa Rica	Palm oil
Côte d'Ivoire	Cocoa, palm oil
Ecuador	Cocoa
Ethiopia	Coffee
Ghana	Cocoa, maize, rice, palm oil, cashew
Guatemala	Palm oil
Haiti	Vetiver
Honduras	Coffee, palm oil
India	Cotton, spices, castor oil, chilli, wheat, maize, chickpea, soyabean, sugarcane, red pepper, sugar, tea, coffee, milk, guar gum

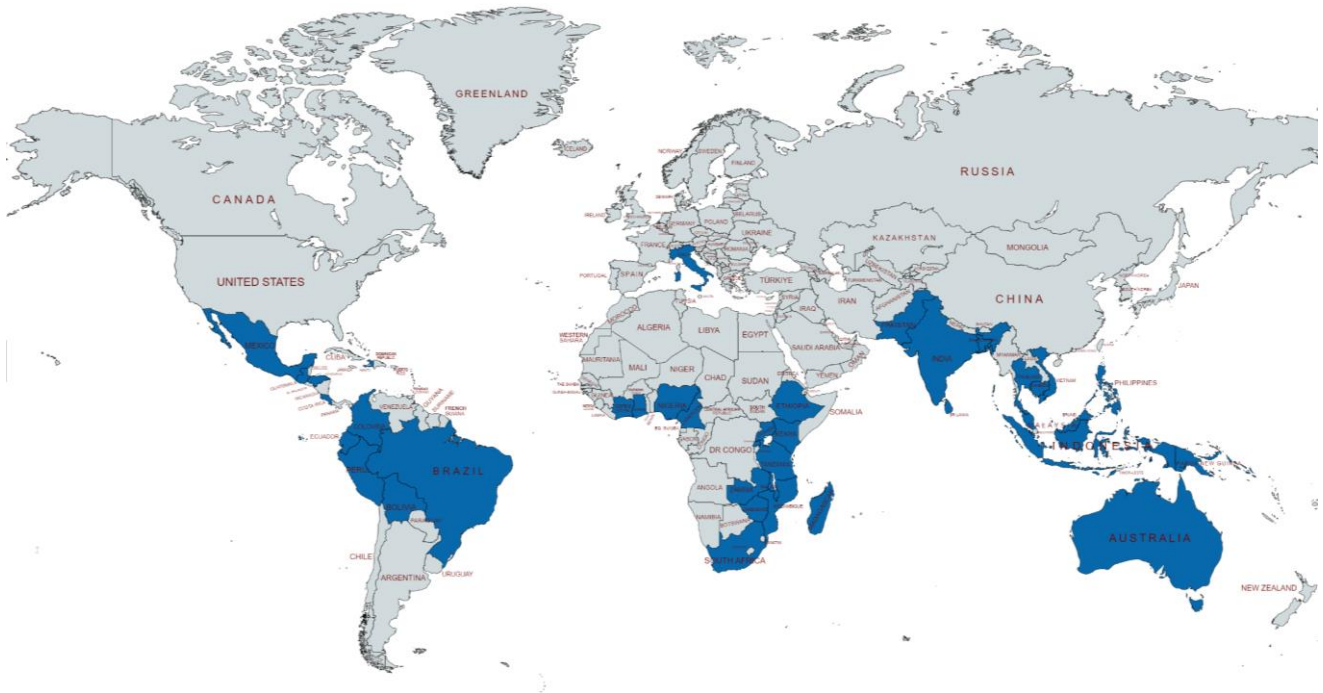


Indonesia	Cocoa, palm oil, coffee, vanilla, coconut
Italy	Olives
Kenya	Poultry, tea
Madagascar	Vanilla beans
Malawi	Tea
Malaysia	Palm oil
Mexico	Barley, palm oil, maize, cotton
Mozambique	Sugar
Nigeria	Maize, milk, palm oil, soyabean, cocoa
Pakistan	Cotton, spices
Papua New Guinea	Palm oil
Peru	Coffee
Philippines	Maize, coconuts, vegetables, rice
Rwanda	Maize, tea
Solomon Islands	Palm oil
South Africa	Sugar
Sri Lanka	Tea
Tanzania	Sorghum
Thailand	Sugar, palm oil
Uganda	Sorghum
Vietnam	Coffee, black pepper
Zambia	Cashew
Zimbabwe	Sugar

Companies managing large global trade volumes in key agricultural commodities (such as soya, palm oil and coffee) must take responsibility for their supply chains. While commodity dependence drives business, it also brings a responsibility regarding the livelihoods of small-scale producers. Fostering a fair and sustainable agricultural commodity trading system requires collaboration between governments, international organisations, companies and small-scale producers. Striking the right balance between profit and social responsibility is essential for a resilient and inclusive global food system.



FIGURE 1: OVERVIEW OF FOOD COMMODITY SOURCING LOCATIONS BY THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE BENCHMARK COMPANIES



Key strategies for private sector engagement

Successful private sector engagement requires a collaborative approach, alignment of goals and a focus on creating shared value for both the private sector and small-scale producers. When engaging with small-scale producers, the private sector can adopt several key strategies to create meaningful impact and foster sustainable development. WBA works with several stakeholder groups through the WBA Alliance, the Expert Review Committees and interested partners to develop our benchmark methodologies that show the expectations and standards required for companies to meet. We then use the findings as a road map to clarify where and how companies can improve their efforts and performance. To support small-scale producer inclusion and engagement, WBA encourages companies to strengthen strategies and partnerships by providing funding/financing for inputs and market access, capacity building, technology transfer and innovation support.

Strong partnerships between companies and small-scale producers exist and can be complemented by WBA's data

Our research shows that the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies actively collaborate with diverse stakeholders to engage with small-scale producers. These partners



include foundations (company and international), financial institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and multilateral organisations, academia, research institutions and consulting firms. Annex 1 lists these partners.

Examples of private sector engagement and collaboration include international and company foundations, which provide funding, expertise and resources for sustainable agricultural practices and community development initiatives. In addition, several financial institutions offer access to finance, credit and insurance products tailored to the needs of small-scale producers, fostering economic stability and growth. However, the Food and Agriculture Benchmark engagements raised concerns about who exactly is paying for the just transition for small-scale producers to reduce inequalities and impacts of climate change in the food system transformation. Through WBA initiatives such as the WBA Alliance or the Collective Impact Coalitions, the Food and Agriculture Benchmark can highlight these concerns by working closely with relevant investors and funders to ensure the private sector is clear about its responsibility regarding the inclusion and needs of small-scale producers.

We also identified NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) that play a crucial role in facilitating partnerships, advocating producers' rights and implementing grassroots projects. Engagement with such NGOs and CSOs can complement the benchmark when it comes to understanding the impact of influential global companies. In 2024, WBA embarked on an impact project centred around small-scale food producers, starting with small sugarcane producers in Thailand. The study is ongoing and will guide the Food and Agriculture Benchmark on how to collaborate with NGOs/CSOs to ensure the benchmark results in a positive impact on the lives of the small-scale producers most impacted by benchmarked companies. See the relevant section later in the report for more details on the WBA impact project.

Many of the companies assessed by the benchmark work closely with governments and multilateral organisations to enhance the resilience and competitiveness of small-scale producers through policy frameworks, funding schemes and capacity-building programmes. One of WBA's top priorities is to support governments with their national pathways through organisations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) or the World Bank by generating insights on gaps and opportunities regarding business impact at the national/regional level. In addition, WBA aims to work closely with the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub to introduce a corporate accountability mechanism into the stocktaking moments that shows the performance of global multinationals on inclusion of and engagement with small-scale producers.

Companies also report engagement with academia and research institutions which provide valuable insights, innovation and technical support to improve agricultural practices and market access for small-scale producers. Through the WBA Allies working with the benchmark companies, WBA can ensure their expertise and knowledge are included in the development of a methodology that is relevant for small-scale producers, and that the findings are used to support projects focused on producer productivity and better livelihoods.

Lastly, the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies report engagement with consulting firms. Consulting firms provide strategic guidance, market intelligence and project management expertise to enhance private sector engagement and impact measurement in sustainable agriculture initiatives. This collaborative ecosystem creates synergies and amplifies the positive impact of private sector investments in training, capacity building and market



linkages for small-scale producers. Through the consultancy café hosted by WBA, the Food and Agriculture Benchmark will continue to engage and share insights that can guide companies in their strategies to align with stakeholder expectations on the responsibilities of companies to support small-scale producers.

Most companies invest in capacity building and training programmes for small-scale producers

Capacity building and training for small-scale producers are essential to enhance their productivity, sustainability and economic viability. These initiatives focus on equipping producers with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to enable them to thrive, compete in markets, adopt sustainable practices and contribute to inclusive economic growth.

Investment in training and capacity building is the most common strategy adopted by the private sector, with 65 of the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies having training programmes for small-scale producers. While the majority of companies (such as Aldi Nord, BASF, Bunge, Indofood and Wilmar International) focus on training and capacity building related to sustainable practices, companies such as Anheuser-Busch InBev also invest in financial training for small-scale producers. In addition to upskilling farmers in agricultural methods and practices, a few companies (including Diageo and Louis Dreyfus Company) invest in training specifically targeting women and young small-scale producers.

Engaging small-scale producers through training programmes conducted in local contexts significantly enhances the effectiveness of private sector initiatives. Tailoring training according to producers' specific cultural and regional nuances ensures better comprehension and practical application of the knowledge. This approach respects and incorporates local traditions and practices, making the training more relevant and impactful. It also encourages active participation, as producers feel more comfortable and connected to the material presented. By focusing on local contexts, these training programmes can effectively address unique challenges faced by small-scale producers, ultimately leading to improved agricultural practices, increased productivity and better economic outcomes.

However, fewer than five companies reported considering local contexts while training small-scale producers. For example, OCP Company has an OCP School Lab (OSL), which is aimed at improving the productivity of smallholder farmers in vital crops. OSL comprises two main components: the School and the Lab. The School is a mobile platform that offers interactive training sessions featuring live demonstrations and instructional videos, focusing on the adoption of best agricultural practices. Meanwhile, the Lab serves as a mobile laboratory equipped with advanced technologies like X-rays, big data analysis and machine learning. It conducts soil testing to provide real-time information on soil conditions and offers customised fertiliser recommendations based on these insights. Together, these components of OSL contribute to enhancing the yields and efficiency of smallholder farmers by providing them with valuable knowledge and tools for sustainable agriculture.

Access to finance and markets

Access to finance and markets is a critical area where private sector engagement can significantly benefit small-scale producers. These producers often face barriers such as limited access to credit, high interest rates and a lack of collateral, which restrict their ability to invest



in better inputs, technology and sustainable practices. By partnering with financial institutions, the private sector can provide tailored financial products and services, including microloans, insurance and savings accounts, designed to meet the unique needs of small-scale producers. Additionally, companies can facilitate market access by integrating small-scale producers into their supply chains, offering them stable and fair prices and providing platforms for direct sales to consumers. This engagement not only improves the economic stability of small-scale producers but also enhances their capacity to participate in global markets.

Companies undertake varied approaches to support small-scale producers, ranging from financial premiums to risk-sharing measures. For example, to support smallholders in earning a living income, ALDI Nord provides financial premiums and implements risk-sharing measures such as long-term contracts and insurance schemes to enhance the resilience of small-scale producers. Additionally, ALDI Nord promotes income diversification to avoid overproduction and mitigate ecosystem pressure. The company works with partners to ensure smallholders have access to credit, loans, inputs and training, thereby fostering sustainable agricultural practices and financial stability.

Village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) play a crucial role in empowering rural communities, particularly women, by providing access to financial services in areas where traditional banking is scarce. VSLAs are community-based groups that facilitate saving, borrowing and investing through a collective approach. Members contribute regularly to a communal fund, which can be accessed as loans to support income-generating activities, cover emergency expenses or pay for essential needs such as school fees and medical costs. These associations not only enhance financial inclusion and economic resilience but also promote social cohesion and empowerment, enabling participants to develop small businesses and improve their livelihoods.

Lindt and Sprüngli's Farming Program trains farmers and their spouses in diverse income-generating activities, offering start-up capital and savings and loan opportunities. In 2022, 11,555 individuals were trained and 30,083 households adopted non-cocoa livelihood options, including food crops, pig farming and beekeeping. The programme also facilitates VSLAs, enhancing access to financial services. By 2022, 459 VSLAs had been established, benefitting 10,465 members, particularly women, by supporting small businesses and savings for essential expenses.

Technology transfer and innovation support

Private sector companies play a vital role in fostering innovation and technology transfer among small-scale producers. Through targeted initiatives and collaborations, these companies can provide invaluable support to enhance productivity, sustainability and competitiveness for small-scale farming. By offering access to modern technologies, such as precision farming tools, Internet of Things devices and efficient irrigation systems, small-scale producers can optimise resource utilisation and improve production. Additionally, knowledge-sharing programmes, training workshops and mentorship opportunities facilitated by private sector entities enable producers to adopt best practices and innovative techniques. This supports a culture of continuous improvement and resilience in the face of evolving challenges, notably climate change.



Technology transfer and innovation support are crucial aspects of private sector engagement in supporting small-scale producers. Key strategies and initiatives to facilitate technology transfer and innovation support are:

Partnerships with tech providers: Collaborate with technology providers, research institutions, universities and innovation hubs to facilitate the transfer of appropriate technologies, tools and innovations to small-scale producers. This can include machinery, digital tools, precision-farming techniques and sustainable practices.

Demonstration farms and field trials: Establish demonstration farms and conduct field trials to showcase new technologies and innovative practices to small-scale producers. Provide hands-on training, technical support and guidance on adopting and implementing these innovations effectively.

Extension services and advisory support: Offer extension services and advisory support to small-scale producers, providing them with access to agronomic expertise, technical advice and best practices in technology adoption. This includes training on using new equipment, optimising inputs and improving production efficiency.

Networking and knowledge sharing: Facilitate networking, knowledge sharing and learning exchanges among small-scale producers, technology providers, experts and stakeholders. Encourage collaboration, peer-to-peer learning and sharing of success stories and lessons learned in adopting and applying new technologies.

Sustainable innovation: Emphasise sustainable innovation by promoting technologies and practices that improve productivity, conserve resources, reduce environmental impact and enhance resilience to climate change and market fluctuations.

Stakeholder consultations

To complement the research on the link between the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies and small-scale producers, WBA reached out to stakeholder groups representing the interests of small-scale farmers and fishers to ask them about the role WBA can play in shining a spotlight on small-scale producers. Participants represented organisations such as Degas, 60 Decibels, The Syngenta Foundation, World Bank, IFPRI, PanAfrican Farmers Organisation (PAFO), Fair Planet, Wageningen University, the German government's development agency GIZ, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USAID, OECD, Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust, Asian Seafood Improvement Collaborative, FutureFish, Conservation International, University of Aveiro and Sustainable Fish. The consultation interviews focused on five questions to understand the value of developing a small-scale producer benchmark, existing frameworks WBA should align with, data gaps, priority impact areas and how benchmarking can support corporate accountability.

The collective response is in favour of WBA developing a small-scale producer benchmark, recognising its timeliness and potential for multinationals to drive positive change across



sectors in the value chain. The feedback provided underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach that considers the unique challenges and opportunities faced by small-scale producers in the global food system. Stakeholders' call to action includes continued collaboration, data-driven decision-making and company commitment to supporting the livelihoods of small-scale producers.

A small-scale producer benchmark would be beneficial for consumers, certification organisations, small-scale farmers and fishers by providing increased transparency and understanding of supply chains. Stakeholders stress the usefulness of benchmark data for governments and regulators to understand the efforts and impact of companies on small-scale producers. They also see the benchmark as a means to strengthen collaboration between donors, companies and technical assistants, providing valuable user cases and insights to support small-scale farmers and fishers.

There is a significant lack of existing frameworks focused on small-scale producers and the private sector both for farmers and fishers. This is an opportunity for WBA to collaborate with other organisations to set clear expectations and strengthen frameworks for business actions, especially by multinationals, for the inclusion of small-scale producers in company strategies, operations and corporate accountability processes. There is a need to focus on broader smallholder activities beyond specific commodities by encouraging diversification and showcasing success stories. Such efforts require partnerships with organisations such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) to consider practices and guidelines for large multinationals and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies.

Furthermore, there is a need to address the private sector's performance regarding small-scale producers' information gap, which must be closed if the SDGs are to be achieved. Data gaps around farmer-provider linkages exist, specifically a lack of consistent data combining information from both farmers/fishers and service or product providers. Understanding the linkages between corporations and smallholders is important for informed decision-making.

In addition, information about supply chain dynamics, traceability and transparency is essential. Questions related to company support for local infrastructure and accessibility need exploration. Stakeholders suggest dialogues to rethink wealth redistribution among value chain actors, addressing intermediary roles and responsibilities in pricing strategies. Additionally, understanding and mitigating food loss in the supply chain is crucial to enhance sustainable practices and the income of primary producers. Small-scale farming is perceived as risky, hence the need for more insights into insurance practices along with the confidence companies have in their farmers. This information is crucial for understanding the financial resilience of small-scale producers and developing a targeted approach to drive impactful change.

Participants' suggestions on specific impact areas for the benchmark are broad, diverse and mostly linked to their line of work and the priorities of their organisations. However, recognising the complexities of multinationals' long value chains, they see a need to understand the factors influencing behaviour change in small-scale producers and improving relationships between companies and farmers/fishers. They suggest evaluating the entire value chain and learning from successful initiatives like WBA's Access to Seeds Index, which evaluated the efforts of multinationals to provide access to quality seeds for smallholder farmers. The recommendation for WBA is to consider a phased approach. This would start with company



assessments on changes in production and income growth for small-scale producers over time and allow for the benchmark to develop more topics in the future.

Other topics to consider include affordability, notably the cost and ability of small-scale producers to engage in supply chains through e.g. certification processes or meeting market standards. In terms of social and well-being impact, stakeholders called for initiatives to empower women farmers/fishers, ensuring their voices are adequately represented. Last but not least, the environmental impact was mentioned with a strong emphasis on climate resilience.

While participants see potential in a small-scale producer benchmark, they stressed the importance of industry buy-in and strategic partnerships if the benchmark is to galvanise companies to prioritise small-scale producers and be a catalyst for positive change. WBA engagement with companies must show the importance of businesses aligning sales with sustainability key performance indicators (KPIs), as well as incorporating due diligence efforts which are critical for benchmark success. Collaboration with investors might enhance the benchmark's effectiveness. There is a consensus that the benchmark could also improve transparency and accountability. However, regional variations exist, with European companies perceived as taking the SDGs more seriously than counterparts in the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Impact project

WBA has embarked on an impact project centred around small-scale food producers, starting with small sugarcane producers in Thailand. The project is an integral component of our ongoing commitment to assess our influence on our most vulnerable stakeholders. In this inaugural phase, we have established a partnership with the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, United States, with five students embarking on a two-month fieldwork expedition to Thailand.

The project aims to better understand how large food and agriculture companies impact the lives of small-scale producers and how the Food and Agriculture Benchmark can effectively support stakeholders working in favour of small sugarcane producers' needs/priorities in Thailand. This includes furthering our knowledge of the sugarcane industry footprint in Thailand, examining the relevance for small-scale producers of indicators included in the Food and Agriculture Benchmark, and identifying which stakeholders are best positioned to leverage the benchmark in their advocacy strategies. To this end, the central question guiding this project is: what are the key strategies and advocacy objectives of stakeholders working in favour of small-scale sugarcane producers in Thailand and how can WBA benchmarks be used to create a positive impact?

From March to June 2024, the students carried out secondary research to identify which Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies procure sugarcane from Thailand and to familiarise themselves with relevant benchmark indicators and company performance on these over the benchmark's two iterations (2021 and 2023). During the fieldwork phase of the project in June and July, the team used a mixed methods approach to conduct key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions to deepen the understanding of the sugarcane industry footprint in



Thailand. The team conducted KIIs with members of CSOs and NGOs to gather insights on their perspectives of the relationship between small-scale sugarcane producers and companies (observed interaction, barriers that they face and needs), and the usefulness and limitations of WBA's materials and the Food and Agriculture Benchmark.

The KIIs were supported by focus group discussions (FGDs) to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the situation. Although there are many stakeholders within the Thai sugarcane supply chain, the team focused on those 'closest' to the problem. These include: small-scale sugarcane producers, farmer co-operatives, employees of small-scale sugarcane producers, CSOs, certification organisations and NGOs. Analysis of the results and report writing will be done between August and October. A final summary report outlining key recommendations and actionable insights will be published in November.

The outcomes of this research will be used to further our knowledge of the sugarcane industry footprint in Thailand, especially on issues concerning small-scale sugarcane producers. It will also be used to refine our Food and Agriculture Benchmark indicators, gain a better understanding of how WBA benchmarks can be used to positively impact the livelihoods of these small-scale farmers and to foster the dissemination and utilisation of our data by key stakeholders, including CSOs, NGOs and local communities, to support advocacy efforts on behalf of farmers.

Allies Assembly 2024

The Allies Assembly is WBA's annual gathering, during which an international and multi-stakeholder community comes together to inspire diverse partnerships to drive collective action on sustainable development. During the 2024 event in Bangkok, Thailand, panel discussions were held on policy and private sector interventions focused on small-scale producers.

Outcomes from the session on multi-stakeholder interventions focused on small-scale producers

The discussion highlighted key strategies and challenges in supporting small-scale producers across various sectors. Musim Mas emphasised the importance of smallholder farmers in its palm oil supply chain, noting the need for financial support, trust-building and collaboration with governments to improve production and market access. FutureFish focused on smallholders in aquatic food production, particularly in Africa and Asia, and stressed the need for sustainable practices and the use of digital platforms to enhance visibility and efficiency. Save the Children underscored its commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable children through financial literacy and empowerment programmes, using role models to make farming more aspirational. Clim-Eat discussed innovations for climate-resilient food systems and the need to connect high-level discussions with the realities of smallholders in low- and middle-income countries, promoting practices like organic fertiliser use to enhance resilience and reduce emissions.



Common themes included the necessity of building trust between smallholders and larger organisations, the importance of integrating sustainable practices and addressing greenwashing concerns. All panellists agreed on the value of using technology and digital platforms to improve smallholders' access to markets and resources.

Policy recommendations

Recommendations for policymakers to foster a conducive environment for private sector engagement with small-scale producers

For policymakers to foster a conducive environment for private sector engagement with small-scale producers, the following factors need to be considered.

- **Regulatory frameworks:** Develop clear and supportive regulatory frameworks that promote private sector investment, innovation and collaboration with small-scale producers. Ensure that regulations are transparent, predictable and conducive to business growth.
- **Incentives and support programmes:** Offer incentives such as tax breaks, grants, subsidies and technical assistance to encourage private sector engagement with small-scale producers. Design support programmes that facilitate access to finance, markets, technology and capacity-building initiatives.
- **Partnership platforms:** Establish platforms for dialogue, coordination and collaboration between policymakers, private sector entities, small-scale producers, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships to address common challenges and leverage synergies.
- **Capacity building:** Invest in capacity-building programmes for policymakers, government officials and regulatory agencies to enhance their understanding of the needs, priorities and challenges faced by small-scale producers and the private sector. Encourage training on policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- **Market access:** Develop strategies to improve market access for small-scale producers by promoting fair-trade practices, market linkages, value chain integration and market intelligence. Facilitate access to local, regional and international markets through trade agreements and market-development initiatives.
- **Technology transfer and innovation:** Create mechanisms to facilitate technology transfer, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture for small-scale producers. Support research and development initiatives, pilot projects and demonstration farms to showcase innovative solutions and best practices.
- **Land tenure and rights:** Address land tenure issues, land rights and access to natural resources for small-scale producers. Ensure secure land tenure, land-use planning and sustainable land management practices that promote inclusivity, equity and environmental sustainability.
- **Policy coherence:** Ensure coherence and alignment between agricultural policies, trade policies, environmental policies, social policies and development goals to create an



enabling environment for private sector engagement with small-scale producers. Avoid conflicting regulations and promote policy coherence for sustainable development.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of policies, programmes and interventions aimed at promoting private sector engagement with small-scale producers. Use data-driven insights to inform policy decisions, adapt strategies and measure progress towards inclusive and sustainable development.

Policy example affecting small-scale producers

The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDD) is a legislative initiative proposed by the European Union (EU) to ensure that businesses operating in the EU respect human rights and the environment throughout their supply chains, including interactions with small-scale producers.

Under the directive, businesses will be required to conduct due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for adverse impacts related to human rights, the environment and governance within their operations and supply chains. It further emphasises transparency in supply chains, which can benefit small-scale producers by providing them with visibility into how their products are sourced, processed and distributed.

The CSDD aims to promote responsible business conduct and contribute to sustainable development, including the empowerment and protection of small-scale producers within global supply chains. It may encourage collaboration between businesses and small-scale producers to address sustainability challenges together. This could involve capacity building, technology transfer and financial support to improve sustainability practices.

Conclusion

Summary of key points and next steps

Private sector engagement with small-scale producers is essential for promoting inclusive economic development, sustainable agriculture and poverty reduction in rural communities. Collaboration between governments, companies and other stakeholders is crucial for overcoming challenges and realising the full potential of small-scale producers in global supply chains. Private sector engagement is also essential for supporting small-scale producers in developing countries, as it contributes to their economic empowerment, sustainability and market access. Small-scale producers face various challenges, including limited access to technology, financial capital, market information and sustainable practices. Geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure further exacerbate these challenges.

Companies across the food value chain, from agricultural input providers to food retailers, can support small-scale producers by providing access to inputs, markets, technology and capacity-building. Companies should invest in the inclusion of small-scale producers, starting with defining the major characteristics of and needs particular to these primary producers, to ensure



that they are supported in company strategies, operations and partnerships. The majority of the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies that have commitments and/or activities targeting small-scale producers are publicly listed, with a concentration in regions like Europe and Central Asia, followed by North America and the East Asia and Pacific regions.

Although limited, companies undertake initiatives such as capacity building, access to markets and technology, financial support and certification programmes to support small-scale producers in their supply chains. Engagement with policymakers who play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for private sector engagement with small-scale producers is important. Supportive regulatory frameworks, incentives and partnerships are vital for fostering collaboration and addressing barriers. Private sector engagement with small-scale producers holds the potential for increased inclusivity and impact in agricultural supply chains, with a focus on sustainability, digitalisation, market diversification and collaborative partnerships.

Next steps: WBA's contribution towards small-scale producers' inclusion in corporate accountability

1. In the next two years, WBA will deepen the understanding of corporate activities involving small-scale producers by incorporating key indicators from the Access to Seeds Index and the Seafood Stewardship Index into the Food and Agriculture Benchmark as a catalytic theme for systems transformation.
2. WBA is working towards understanding the number of small-scale producers impacted by multinational corporations across all the 2,000 companies benchmarked by WBA (SDG2000). The goal is to articulate company footprint/impact on people in supply chains holistically, given the long supply chains of the SDG2000 companies.
3. We will establish the Food and Agriculture Benchmark's place in the multilateral system by developing a corporate accountability mechanism for the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards stocktaking process which champions putting small-scale producers at the centre of food systems transformation.
4. Through the Food and Agriculture Benchmark, WBA plans to support governments with their national pathways through partnerships on a set of priority countries, especially low- and middle-income countries where small-scale producers are dominant, to help generate insights on gaps and opportunities for businesses.
5. We will strengthen engagement and collaboration with existing and potential Allies on small-scale producer support through the Collective Impact Coalitions, key events/launches, policy advocacy and snapshots.



Annex 1

Table: Private sector partners of the 350 Food and Agriculture Benchmark companies

	Foundations/cooperatives/associations
1	BAIF Development Research Foundation
2	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
3	CLUSA International
4	Cocoa Horizons Foundation
5	Cooperative of Family Agriculture Rural Producers (COOPERFAM)
6	Cotton Connect
7	Earthworm Foundation
8	ECOOKIM, a Fairtrade Cooperatives Union
9	ETG Farmers Foundation (EFF)
10	European Cocoa Association (ECA)
11	Fundación Valles
12	Grameen Foundation
13	Heifer International
14	Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming
15	National Cooperative Business Association
16	Nigerian cooperative MILCOPAL
17	Odebrecht Foundation
18	ProTerra Foundation
19	Rikolto and Kuapa Kokoo
20	S M Sehgal Foundation
21	Wild Asia
	Company foundations
1	André and Lucia Maggi Foundation
2	Givaudan Foundation
3	Jollibee Group Foundation
4	Louis Dreyfus Foundation
5	Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (SFSA)
6	The Coca-Cola Foundation
7	The Mosaic Company Foundation
8	Walmart Foundation
	Non-governmental organisations
1	Agricultural Cooperative Development International (ACDI)/Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA)
2	Bonsucro
3	Care Denmark
4	CARE International, Proforest
5	Ethical Tea Initiative
6	Fairtrade
7	GoodWeave International
8	IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative



9	Justice, Development and Peace Commission
10	Mercy Corps
11	One Acre Fund
12	Partner Africa
13	Partners in Food Solutions (PFS)
14	Proforest Initiative Africa (Proforest)
15	PUM Netherlands
16	Rainforest Alliance
17	Root Capital
18	Save the Children
19	Sustainable Food Lab
20	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
21	UN World Food Programme (WFP)
22	WWF Germany
	Civil society organisations
1	Solidaridad
2	TechnoServe
3	Wild Asia
	Certifications
1	Bio Suisse certification
2	ISPO certification
3	Oritain
4	Rainforest Alliance
	Joint initiatives/coalitions/alliances
1	Akwandze Agricultural Finance
2	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)
3	Cargill Cocoa Promise
4	Cocoa Sustainability Initiative (CSI)
5	Côte d'Ivoire Land Partnership (CLAP)
6	Cotton made in Africa (CmiA)
7	Global Tea Coalition
8	Hatching Hope Foundation
9	Indonesian Sustainable Oil Palm Smallholders Forum
10	Nestlé income accelerator program
11	Sustainable Castor Initiative – Pragati
12	Sustainable Spices Initiative (SSI)
13	West Africa Trade & Investment Hub (Trade Hub)
14	Wild Asia Group Scheme (WAGS)
15	World Cocoa Foundation's Cocoa and Forests Initiative (CFI)
	Government/multilateral agencies
1	Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
2	Brazilian Federal Government
3	Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply
4	Danida



5	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (German Corporation for International Cooperation, GIZ)
6	DFID Impact Acceleration Facility, managed by CDC Group plc (CDC)
7	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
8	French Development Agency (AFD)
9	Government of Rwanda
10	Ketapang District Government
11	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
12	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
13	Nigerian Government
14	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
15	Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)
16	UN World Food Programme (WFP)
17	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
18	USAID Green Invest Asia
19	USDA
	Technology providers
1	BanQu
2	Koltiva
3	IBM's The Weather Company
4	Stellapps
5	Vodacom
	Academic/research institutes
1	ADM Institute for the Prevention of Postharvest Loss at the University of Illinois and the Soybean Innovation Lab
2	Agricultural Training Institute
3	Barotseland University
4	Danish Agricultural and Food Council, Seges and the Nigerian pastoralist organisation CORET
5	Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Credit Policy Council (DA-ACPC)
6	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zurich (ETH Zurich (ETHZ)) in Switzerland and Indonesia's Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB)
7	German Development Finance Institution (DEG)
8	Global Center and Commission on Adaptation (GCA)
9	Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazonia (IPAM)
10	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
11	Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers
12	Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development (OICSD), UPL Centre for Agriculture Excellence (CAE)
13	Sylvio Moreira Citrus Research Center (CCSM) of the Agronomic Institute (IAC)
14	The Center for Sustainable Small-owners at the Asia School of Business
	Financial institutions
1	Banko, the micro-finance arm of the Bank of the Philippine Islands
2	Dutch Development Bank (FMO), International Finance Corporation (IFC)
3	IFC, Inter-American Development Bank
4	Inter-American Development Bank
5	MUFG and Bank Danamon
6	Rabobank's Rabo Partnership



	Consulting firms
1	Institute for Development Impact (IDI)
2	Sahel Consulting-managed programme ALDDN (Advanced Local Dairy Development Nigeria)





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