

Topic #2: Adjusting food supply chains to tackle food waste

I. Background Information

Receiving enough food and nutrition for human bodies is essential for all people around the world. Yet about one third of the population is facing food insecurity, 150 million children younger than five years old are missing essential nutrients for their growth and up to 783 million people suffer from being affected by hunger each year. Since the year 2019 the number of people being affected by hunger has increased by more than 122 million.

These numbers are making food concerning issues global. One of the causes of this pressing issue is food loss and food waste. Regarding general definition, it is a decrease in the quality or quantity of edible food meant for human consumption. It is important to differentiate between food loss and food waste.

Food loss is caused by decisions and actions taken by food suppliers in the chain, so any food discarded along the supply chain, meaning during storage, transport and processing. Food waste, however, is caused by the decisions and actions taken by retailers, food service providers and consumers. For context, around 19% of food is being wasted by consumers or directly in the stores and about 13% of the world's food is lost before it reaches stores.

One of the possible solutions is to adjust food supply chains to be more sustainable. The food supply chain doesn't have an exact definition, but it can be explained as a journey of food starting for example at a farm and ending on consumers tables. This process contains multiple steps, which are usually made by multiple parties. The flow of information and materials needs to be well coordinated, or it can cause a lot of harm to our environment. It all starts with problematic harvesting and ends with consumers' habits driven by society.

Trying to make this process more sustainable is not going to be only the solution for decreasing food insecurity. An estimated 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are created by food loss and waste. Of course, by wasting food, the agricultural lands from where that food was harvested is being directly wasted as well. And economic losses are playing a major role as well.

It is crucial to take notice that food loss and food waste may take different forms in different countries. But it is also important to remember that the problems created by it are all affecting everyone.

II. United Nations Involvement

The United Nations recognizes the importance of this topic, and it is actively addressing it through different initiatives under different organizations, especially regarding this solution. One of their main goals is fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and here specifically the target 12.3. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are facing and tackling the most pressing challenges of today's world with the idea of improving the world for future generations. Target 12.3 concerns itself with halving per capita global food waste at the

retail and consumer levels and reducing food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses by 2030. Yet only 9 out of 193 countries have included food waste in their Nationally Determined Contributions as of 2022. This target has two components which are measured by two different indicators (Food Loss Index and Food Waste Index). FAO highly recommends using these two indicators and collecting data for various stages of the food supply chain, to be then able to recognize the root of a problem.

An important organization to mention is the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Apart from addressing the consequences of food waste, fighting hunger, they are directly working on reaching the SDGs as well. They are addressing non-sustainable food supply chains locally, trying to make them more sustainable.

Another United Nations organization is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), whose main mission is to inform, inspire and help. They try to strengthen countries to help them achieve the SDGs, concerning the target 12.3 they concentrate on data monitoring and collecting to provide countries information to analyze.

Resilient Local Food Supply Chains Alliance (RLFSC Alliance) is one of the resilience coalitions of the United Nations Food Systems Summit Process in 2020 and 2021. Their main focus is on building resilient food supply chains which directly rebuild and support the foundation of the agri-food system.

One last example of UN involvement can be mentioned the Food is Never Waste Coalition which was launched at the Food Systems Pre-Summit in Rome, in 2021, with its main goal to accelerate the pace of reducing the food loss and waste, and also going towards achieving SDG target 12.3.

III. Questions to Consider

When writing your Position Papers and Resolutions, concentrate on the following questions:

- What are the main challenges your country faces in reducing food waste (where are the primary causes of ...)?
- Does your country take any steps to reduce food waste in its own supply chain? If yes, which ones?
- How can supply chain adjustments to reduce food waste benefit long-term food security?
- How can your country support global agreements to reduce food waste?
- Has your country adopted any new technologies or methods to reduce spoilage during harvesting, storage, distribution...?
- How can supply chain parties collaborate to ensure that excess food gets redirected to areas of need instead of being discarded?

When doing your research, concentrate on researching information that is relevant to your country. You will need to have a firm understanding of your country's policy towards issues which are valid today. However, it is important to get acquainted with the country's past policy towards the problems, seeing that there could be some sort of connection to be made.

Also, it is highly advised to find out about your country's relations with other countries and about their perspective on issues.

IV. Useful Links

→ FAO

<https://www.fao.org/home/en/>

→ FAO Country profiles

<https://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/en/>

→ Food Waste Index report 2024

<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/45230>

→ World Food Programme

<https://www.wfp.org/>

→ UN Environment Programme

<https://www.unep.org/>

V. Sources

- <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/45230>
- <https://unric.org/en/unric-library-backgroundunder-food-waste/>
- https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/chge/files/lesson_4_1.pdf
- https://catalogue.unccd.int/1679_FoodWaste.pdf
- <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2010.0126#d3e2132>
- <https://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/tl0010>
- <https://www.undp.org/sdg-accelerator/background-goals>
- https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal12#targets_and_indicators
- <https://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals-data-portal/data/indicators/1231-global-food-losses/en>
- <https://www.wfp.org/food-systems>
- <https://www.unep.org/topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-12-9>
- <https://www.worldfarmersmarketscoalition.org/rfsc/>
- <https://www.fao.org/platform-food-loss-waste/background/food-is-never-waste-coalition/en>