

## International Agri-Food Network Working Paper

### Concepts for Private Sector Modalities

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has 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 holds true across virtually every field of the FAO's work, from agriculture, to forestry, to fisheries, to natural resource management, at all levels, global, regional, national, and local.

In 2013 the FAO developed a "Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector", in order to better leverage the enormous potential of closer collaboration and coordination. This document was largely focused on partnerships, primarily donations, while modalities for engagement on FAO symposia, and other discussions is not addressed. Greater clarity, consistency, and transparency is needed with regards to the means and capacities by which private sector stakeholders are able to engage with FAO processes. Many meetings for the FAO lack normalized procedures for private sector involvement. The following principles provide a basis for improved modalities of private sector participation, laying the groundwork for more fruitful future partnerships.

#### **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 template.

#### **2. 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.

#### **3. A mechanism should be put in place to facilitate the participation of non-aligned businesses**

- There must be a method for businesses unaffiliated with accredited organizations, or unable to bear the costs of engaging with the FAO by themselves, to participate, for example through the designation of a private sector focal point.

- 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.

#### **4. 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 a number of 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)

#### **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.

#### **5. 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 better publicized.
- 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.