



# REPORT

**INTRODUCTORY CONSULTATION MEETING  
FEBRUARY 27, 2014**

**Food & Business**  
Knowledge Platform



## Introduction

On February 27, 2014, the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) organised an introductory consultation meeting for organisations active in the field of food and nutrition security.

Participants in the meeting were professionals from civil society and semi-public organisations and knowledge institutes working in the field of food and nutrition security, with an interest in knowledge management and innovation.

The objectives of the meeting were to better familiarise participants with the Platform, to enable attendees to provide input on the knowledge agenda and to (further) motivate attendees to participate in the Platform.

## Plenary introduction and Q&A session

The Director of the Platform's Office, Frans Verberne, introduced the Platform by explaining its structure, goals, and ways to get involved. The presentation was followed by a Q&A session.

One of the questions was about why the Platform is entitled 'Food & *Business*' Knowledge Platform. Verberne reacted that the Steering Committee and Office have had long debates on the name and they concluded that while the objective of the Platform is to contribute to food and nutrition security, the role of the business community is very important. The F&BKP will look at business cases which help to foster private sector investment in low and middle income countries and collaboration with local companies.

Attendees, in addition, mentioned their wish to involve all stakeholders of 'the Dutch diamond' in F&BKP meetings like this one, particularly from the private sector. Verberne answered saying that this meeting was organised in response to many requests from civil society organisations to discuss opportunities for cooperation with the F&BKP office. Inviting business representatives to this same introductory meeting hadn't seemed opportune at this stage. He emphasised that companies Top sectors are represented on the Steering Committee of the F&BKP. And that the intention definitely is to have further meetings with groups that are not present at this meeting. In that regard, several participants offered to link their (SME) private sector network with the Platform, stating that those business actors would certainly be interested to cooperate, if the character of the meeting is practice-oriented. Verberne welcomed this and said the Platform has a particular interest to meet with business representatives with a helicopter view, looking beyond their companies' interest. He underlined that SME participation in the Platform is of particular importance. F&BKP will also look at smallholders and microbusinesses. Moreover, NWO-WOTRO, with which the F&BKP is closely related has held well-attended meetings with CSOs and companies.

The representatives also expressed their interest in the Food & Business Research Agenda and its funding possibilities. It was explained that the Applied Research Fund (ARF) concerns the four pillars of the Dutch food security policy. The first Call of Global Challenge Programme (GCP) focused on food chain efficiency and the sustainable increase of quality food. Both funds cover a wide range of topics at present, but future calls may provide a more specific scope.

Verberne furthermore clarified that the F&BKP has a supporting and advisory role with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but has an independent nature and is not limited to the current policy agenda's scope. In reply to a question on best practices, Verberne said that gathering them, preferably together with expert networks, is part of the F&BKP work plan.

One participant stressed the relevance of a [recent publication](#) for the Food & Business knowledge agenda: the recent evaluation of the Top sectors by Erasmus University. It revealed that Top sectors concentrate on technological innovation, while social innovation needs as much attention.

In the Q&A, it was also mentioned that trust building is important to realise sharing of practices and intelligence, and that not all information of the Platform will be put online in order to facilitate this.

## Open Space: Added value of themes for the Dutch Knowledge Agenda

After the plenary part of the meeting, the 40 attendees were invited to actively participate in an 'Open Space' discussion in order to make an inventory of (a cluster of) themes that are crucial for the Dutch knowledge agenda on food and nutrition security. The session started with the definition of five themes based on clustered input of all participants. Subsequently, on every (cluster of) theme(s) a group discussion started. Firstly, participants shared their ideas on the added value of working together within the Platform around the theme they had proposed:

### Sustainable production

**For sustainable production, focussing on the whole value chain is needed, including the end, namely the consumers of the (nutritious) food products. It was stated that it would be good to link with consumer organisations also in the South.**

Participants saw a great potential to have stronger matching between (emergent) African smallholder enterprises in the agricultural sector and their counterparts in The Netherlands. As they have a reputation for quality products and services in agricultural value chains including products and services that strengthen sustainable agricultural practices. Sustainability has to be defined and operationalised in each country and region. The group agreed that the main question is how to support African actors in such a way that they can achieve food sovereignty themselves through a coherent and systemic value chain approach.

The added value of including this knowledge area in the Platform is getting better insight in what is already happening around this theme. The Platform would also enhance and facilitate the linkage with African actors. Another area mentioned was the need and possible role of the Platform in facilitating the setting of clear sustainability standards and practices by research actors. Those researchers can play an important role in contributing to make new markets, products and value chains sustainable from the start, like aquaculture which is now starting in many countries. Lastly, the group saw potential in making emerging regional voices in Africa heard through the Platform, such as on priorities set by regional producer organisations, such as: East Africa dairy; West Africa local rice varieties; Central Africa Urban

Agriculture; Southern Africa; groundnuts. Also the consumers' voice can give pressure and direction to make African value chains more sustainable and local.

## Nutrition security

**Good opportunities exist for fostering linkages between food security, value chains, and nutrition security. This is a new theme with limited international scientific evidence and limited practical evidence. But there is a growing level of activity in this area.**

In this group, ample consensus appeared to exist on the issues that can be treated in the F&BKP within the theme of nutrition security.

First of all, there is a lack of scientific evidence on the impact of interventions in the food chain, including the consumption patterns. Attention for quality food does not imply a direct positive influence on the ultimate nutritional status and the prevention of stunting.

The historically different paradigms regarding food security (focusing on agricultural production and economy) and nutrition security (focus on health) are a bottleneck in improving nutrition security. The necessity to link agriculture, value chains, gender and health is now high on the agenda of donors and the private sector, but tools and guidelines are still missing, e.g. on how to incorporate nutrition principles in value chains and make the agricultural and food sector nutrition-sensitive.

Urbanisation and the role of the private sector are important areas for further elaboration.

Participants also referred to the double burden of malnutrition – obesity and under-nutrition – which even occurs in the same regions (e.g. many parts of Africa), and makes interventions even more complicated.

Furthermore, at the international level, many organisations are advocating for and/or scaling up nutrition (e.g. SUN-movement, IDS, IFPRI, DFID, B&MGates, Feed the Future, GAIN). The Netherlands can play a leading and meaningful role here, since many activities are being implemented by Dutch NGOs, private sector companies, knowledge institutes and government whether or not in alliances. In addition, the Netherlands is strong in the required multi-disciplinary approach and capacity building.

Many Dutch organisations dealing with malnutrition are already cooperating extensively (e.g. in the AIM initiative). Nevertheless, participants saw an added value in working on joint knowledge questions within the F&BKP, such as: monitoring interventions in e.g. value chains and at household level, sharing experience and best practices, communication, and more fundamental research on the ultimate impact. Data are crucial for insight in the cause-effect relations and for the analysis of trends.

As such, the cooperation within F&BKP could strengthen the existing coalitions, build new alliances, feed the research agenda based on practical experiences and needs of the participants, influence policy, and last but not least serve as a focal point for the work on nutrition security.

## Reinforcement of sustainable markets and business circumstances

**Many different organisations develop sustainable value chains. It would be good to create strong connections between research and practice: developing applications, and providing practical input and experiences to research.**

This discussion group dealt with the rather broad theme of how to foster sustainability of food value chains. The (networks of the) organisations participating in this group have lots of practical experiences in promoting sustainability in value chains. These experiences could be a relevant and continuous source of information for the knowledge agenda on food and nutrition security according to group members. Discussing them could contribute to the development of further practical solutions for sustainable value chains.

Attendees also recognised that in parallel, the knowledge agenda should be about systemic changes needed for sustainable markets, which include trade regulations and other policies that are favourable to food and nutrition security. Specific potential knowledge questions centred on: the relations in the chain, the business incentives, the opportunities to upscale promising practice, the opportunities to develop financially sustainable models, the particular role of NGOs in relation to (SME) business communities, off-farm labour options and certification issues.

Concluding the need to foster linkages between practitioners in the value chains and the research community was stressed, as the practical experiences are a relevant resource for research, and organisations working in this area would like to provide input to the future research agenda. The group also acknowledged the relevance of mutual sharing and learning about the approaches and business models used. This would deepen the understanding of the applicability of certain approaches and business models in different contexts.

## Inclusive business models

**To what extent can current business models work to tackle the causes of food insecurity? The F&BKP is a good place to systemise the variety of knowledge on this theme, which exists in the many different organisations.**

This group started defining sub-themes of inclusive business. Sub-themes mentioned include learning around the effectiveness of public-private partnerships and testing the underlying assumptions of the policy on addressing food *insecurity* through inclusive business models. An important question that was raised was how do the latter relate to the actual *causes* of food insecurity and what is an effective role of business in addressing those?

Other interesting and relevant knowledge questions that came up were: How can effective bottom-up innovative approaches be included in business innovation in a way that they actually benefit poorer sections of society? How can youth, women and disadvantaged groups be better included in such initiatives? 'Inclusiveness' is as such defined more specifically related to equity than just to the inclusion of small-scale farmers. The questions were seen relevant for

several reasons. In principle, knowledge accelerates implementation and improves efficiency. Therefore policy implementation strategies are needed. And if they turn out to be ineffective, the policy objectives should be reshaped.

Inclusiveness and business is the agenda where stakeholder groups can meet. It is therefore important that all actors understand each other. Businesses, for example, in general aim to be effective in reaching the poor. It is good that other stakeholders take that into account.

The F&BKP could play a role in systematising knowledge on inclusiveness, i.e. beyond best practice cases and organising inspiration and critical debate. Participants of this group suggested to bring knowledge products that they put together (e.g. business scans), plenty of experiences with PPP's and with value chains, knowledge developed based on bottom-up innovation, and relations with business clients.

## Agro-ecology

**It would be good if the F&BKP could also foster connections with existing (Dutch) networks such as the 'Voedsel Anders Network'. Furthermore, within the Platform the use of research funds can be influenced to embed non-usual themes such as agro-ecology.**

This group proposes to put the theme agro-ecology on the Dutch knowledge agenda. The theme involves diversifying food systems through sustainable practices where nature is respected as much as possible. In that way the dependence on external factors will be reduced and agro-biodiversity increased. Inclusiveness, participation and ownership of (small) peasant men and women are essential to realise agro-biodiversity. It concerns short value chains, but also the connection with long value chains.

The theme was seen as an opportunity for the Netherlands because we are in forefront in this theme. We are good in bringing together different actors and many Dutch parties are active in this area ('Voedsel Anders Network'). The theme contributes to a 'more balanced' knowledge agenda according to participants and improves food and nutrition security for many people. Recognition from the top for this grassroots movement, and integration with other themes and chains is important.

## Open Space: Concrete cooperation in the F&BKP

After discussions on the themes for the Dutch knowledge agenda, the Open Space groups continued by discussing their expectations of, and potential contributions to, the Platform.

Participants foresee that systematised knowledge will be developed within the Platform by combining and synthesising knowledge about practices and experiences, which they can relate to their practices. They would like to: jointly share expertise, experiment with new themes, improve interaction, harmonise and align with a broad international scope of development actors, build up new broad coalitions like twinning structures with Southern parties, compose business cases and partner with businesses, and/or organise joint multi-stakeholder conferences. Attendees also foresee a role

for the Platform in exposing knowledge on priorities as set by Africans and knowledge on learning that takes place in partnerships.

Participants have in mind a composition of overviews of actual development and research results in thematic areas, including but also beyond good practices of which they can learn. By cooperating on knowledge issues they also wish to influence policies and set agendas in order to receive broad recognition of themes and good practices and create support for the implementation of new programmes. Their aim is to develop balanced agendas and, where needed, change perceptions and the way businesses operate.

They expect to also jointly influence (and innovate) calls of the ARF and GCF research funds by developing joint knowledge questions and sharing experiences with research agendas.

They foresee that the Platform will become a contact centre for (existing) working groups and specific themes, where critical debate takes place: 'a place to get inspired and surprised'.

Based on many years of practical (local) experience, the organisations have much to contribute to the Platform, from sharing knowledge and demonstrating best practices on diverse topics and themes like future scenarios, to bringing in advocacy strategies and local networks. They furthermore suggested to jointly monitor calls for research. In the Platform they also want to share their experience with business plans, jointly define business components of a thematic knowledge agenda, execute business scans, and bring in business partners.

## Plenary closure

During a short closing plenary session, each group enthusiastically presented its conclusions. Various groups came up with interesting and concrete ideas for the cooperation within the Platform, which can be concretely elaborated in the coming months. Also, some general final suggestions were offered, including that: gender should be explicitly addressed in each theme; the Platform should always connect with consumers, and that a next F&BKP meeting should certainly gather the different actors including the private sector.

Representatives of the Platform's Steering Committee and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared their positive appreciation for the energetic and valuable discussions with relevant ideas suggested for the knowledge agenda. The chair of the Steering Committee particularly appreciated the recommendation to work with the network of the 'Voedsel Anders' conference and to integrate gender.

Frans Verberne closed the afternoon expressing his appreciation for the active and valuable involvement of the participants and their input for the agenda and the role of the Platform. The Office of the F&BKP will publish information on the website regarding the knowledge agenda, including the scope of future research calls and activities on the initial topics. He repeated that this is only the beginning and foresees a fruitful collaboration into the near future.