

Blog: Improved post harvest management – a key contributor to SDG successes

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With an expected global population increase of more than 2 billion (from 7.6 to 9.8 billion) by 2050; an estimated economic loss of close to \$1 trillion per year; rapid natural resource depletion and a changing climate that is putting pressure on an already stretched food supply, we should have a zero tolerance for food and waste in the twenty first century.

In developing countries, postharvest loss reduction needs to be at the center of strategies for sustainable development. We have the know-how, technologies and capital. However, making progress on this issue requires renewed commitment, and most importantly, action.

Food and nutrition are clearly at the center of the global development agenda. More than half of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relate to food and nutrition. Improved postharvest management (PHM) contributes to several SDGs, including SDG 1, 2, 3, 9, 12 and 13, as these issues are interconnected.

The importance of food loss and waste reduction in achieving the SDGs was highlighted by the UN Deputy Secretary General, Amina Mohammed, during a High-Level Event last year at the 72nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. During the session , dubbed “Championing SDG 12.3 and the Pathway to Zero Hunger”, Ms. Mohammed called “on all partners to adopt a more holistic approach to food security, one that prioritizes food loss and waste, builds new coalitions, scales-up current work, and innovate.”



As with other SDGs, addressing food loss and waste requires new thinking. Millard Fuller’s quote comes handy in this respect, that “It is easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking, than it is to think yourself into a new way of acting.” Traditional agriculture has developed behaviors and expected outcomes over decades. At this point in time, we are required to un-learn some of these practices, question what is being perceived as a given, think out of the box, and innovate. The future of our planet, and our own, depends on this.

We require a global approach that actively engages diverse stakeholders within the market system in collective learning; alongside application and refinement of improved practices to effectively meet local

loss reduction needs. This would not only be critical for the achievement of SDG 12, but for the achievement of the SDG compact.

While PHM is a priority at a global-level, it is also critically important at the continental and national levels. It has the potential to prevent losses equivalent to the food and nutrition requirements of 48m people in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region most at risk of food and nutrition insecurity.

Furthermore, it can contribute towards agricultural transformation on the continent, economic growth in rural areas and import substitution—all critical priorities for the African continent. The significance, contribution, and scale of the PHM issue is recognized by the African Union’s Malabo Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goal 12.3.

‘We commit to... halve the current levels of postharvest losses by the year 2025’ - Article III, Commitment to Ending Hunger in Africa by 2025, Malabo Declaration.

‘By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including postharvest losses’ - SDG 12.3.

In September of last year, 22 senior-level practitioners representing government, research, academia, the private sector, NGOs and the donor community from across the globe gathered at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in Italy to discuss this matter in depth. The conversation reviewed progress towards target 12.3, how to motivate ambition and drive action for improved PHM.

The result was a [statement](#) summarizing our collective commitment to continue raising awareness on the issues, collaborate further, and scale-up effective actions and efforts to achieve a best in class global PHM system. The group also called for large-scale, sustained, coordinated and mutually supportive actions from all stakeholders across agri-food systems, including farmers, aggregators, traders, retailers, PHM technology and service providers, financial institutions, governments, donor agencies, research and academic institutions, and the media.

The “[Bellagio Statement](#)” also seeks to inspire postharvest actors to rethink effective approaches to address the postharvest and food loss issue. Above all, we hope to inspire you to join us and take action.

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