



# The role of value chain development in agri-food systems transformation

## Report on the Symposium

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## Executive Summary

We must recognize that agri-food systems around the world are undergoing profound change. The challenge is to stay within planetary boundaries in the face of major societal problems and under difficult political conditions. Fostering the transition to sustainability is a wicked problem, due to the structural complexity of the agriculture and food sector, and the rapid pace of change. To handle the challenge effectively, systems thinking is necessary. It is important to take into account the various perspectives from which AFS can be viewed.

Agri-food systems are composed of value chains. They constitute a middle level between the overarching framework of an agri-food system and practical action.

Therefore, value chain development remains central as the place where specific problems come to light. It serves as an indispensable starting point for transformative action.

Nevertheless, this requires thinking beyond specific value chains. When developing value chains, it is essential to take into account both food security and livelihoods as well as climate change and natural resources. This requires a multi-chain approach. We need to improve value chain methodologies through a stronger emphasis on a human-centered approach empowering change agents and facilitators within value chains.

There is no single, grand solution; progress comes from small, concrete steps and gradual progress. Therefore, successful transformation requires adaptability, the ability to respond to opportunities, and flexible action.

The effectiveness of value chain development must be measured holistically, in economic, social, and environmental terms, as well as in terms of resilience. Organizations should follow a learning cycle and not limit themselves to implementing projects. In doing so, one must accept incomplete but nonetheless useful information.

Closer collaboration between academia and practitioners is urgently needed. In particular, researchers and practitioners must consciously move beyond their respective perspectives and work hand in hand. This also applies to the stakeholders in public policy and management.

## 1. Background to the symposium

The symposium took place on two consecutive days on September 22 and 23, 2025 at the main building of the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. It was organized by the Centre for Rural Development (SLE) headed by Prof. Dr. Markus Hanisch, and the President of the International ValueLinks Association e.V., Andreas Springer-Heinze.

### **The Challenges at stake**

Over the past three decades, value chain development (VCD) has become a central framework for a large community of practitioners aiming to improve the socio-economic conditions of small entrepreneurs, particularly smallholder farmers, and workers in the food sector in a sustainable way. Despite widespread adoption, VCD projects have yielded mixed evaluation results. Apart from the many successes, some projects have been criticized for their lacking scalability or for impacting social and ecological conditions negatively.

In recent years, the term “agri-food system” (AFS) has emerged in the development debate. AFS are understood “as all the interconnected activities and actors involved in getting food from field to fork” (FAO, 2025).<sup>1</sup> This concept significantly expands the system boundary to include food consumption and food security, as well as the planetary boundaries to agricultural production and the use of natural resources, policies, vested economic interests and other framework conditions. With its holistic approach, it goes beyond the concept of an agricultural value chain. Recently published charts of AFS commonly place value chains at their core. Thus, the value chain approach is still present, but the role of VC development within AFS transformation remains unclear.

This is an urgent challenge. The agri-food sector is faced with deep-seated problems – the combined global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and malnutrition accompanied by increasing social conflicts over food and natural resource use. AFS are highly vulnerable to global warming, armed conflicts, and water scarcity.

AFS, their value chains included, must undergo profound transformation to overcome the challenges of hunger and malnutrition while ensuring the stability of global ecosystems at the same time. The notion of the “Food System Transformation” has become a heading for fundamental change processes and another buzzword at the same time.

The question arises as to where the best starting point lies for promoting the necessary transformation. What are the implications of the shift of focus away from

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/highlights/agri-food-systems/en>

“sustainable value chain development” to the much wider concept of “agri-food systems transformation”? How will the stakeholders of the value chain development school of thought make sense of the AFS transformation perspective? How can stakeholders engage in the wider concept of the AFS transformation while maintaining and utilizing more than thirty years of experience from value chain development?

## **Objectives of the symposium**

The primary objective of the symposium was to foster structured dialogue and collaboration between researchers and value chain practitioners. The event aimed to produce insights on the evolving roles of academia, practice and policy making, discuss their instruments, best practice experience and methods that can inform and shape the next generation of value chain policies and programs conducive to AFS transformation.

## **Working methods and agenda**

The symposium was inspired by three thematic keynotes on the role of value chain development for AFS transformation, the learnings from 20 years of sustainable value chain development and on effective transformation practices.

Each keynote speech was followed by parallel sessions focusing on the significance and practical meaning of six specific topics / design principles drawn from the AFS transformation literature. They included:

1. Systems thinking,
2. Agroecology, landscape, nutrition and economic perspectives,
3. Planetary boundaries to AFS development,
4. Focus on impact,
5. Working with and through change agents, and
6. Transformative action.

Each parallel session was introduced by an input presenter who provided his/her own ideas, questions and experiences about the respective design principle. The inputs served as food for thought on which the subsequent deliberations could build. All parallel sessions were designed as interactive workshops to encourage the active engagement of participants. The organizers, Markus Hanisch and Andreas Springer-Heinze took the role of moderators. Observers summarized the main results and debates visualizing them on pinboards. These became part of a dynamically growing pinboard exhibition (“gallery walk”) in the aula of the venue for everyone to reconsider and learn from each other.

The final working sessions of the symposium consisted of plenary discussions that were dedicated to carving out and describing the attributes and principles of the next

generation of value chain development programs. This concerned (1) the (changing) roles of value chain actors and (2) the principles for future value chain program design. This last step was an interactive collection of conclusions using the “World Café” format. The conclusions resulted in recommendations for five different groups of players that apply the AFS concept.

## Participants

The symposium intended to bring together representatives of research, international development cooperation and decision making. It took place in the main building of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin over the course of two consecutive days. The event was organized by Markus Hanisch and Andreas Springer-Heinze. It brought together 36 invited persons representing:

- United Nations organizations
- International research institutes
- Academic institutions
- Development agencies
- Representatives of national and international development policy

A broader audience participated virtually, accessing the symposium’s presentations online. The list of participants can be found in the annex.



## 2. Introduction by the organizers

To open the symposium, the two organizers, *Markus Hanisch* and *Andreas Springer-Heinze*, engaged in a dialogue in which they took turns presenting the concept behind the symposium. Its starting point are two underlying hypotheses. One is about the future of the value chain approach to development. The other concerns the role of research and academia in light of the urgent need to transform food systems.



Andreas Springer-Heinze spoke to the first hypothesis: Value chain development is a common language between experts and practitioners, a way of systemic thinking that helps to see the economic organization of the agricultural sector from primary production to food consumption. It started out as a rather economic concept in the times of the globalization debate, when the focus was on integrating smallholders into global value chains. We observe that since then the value chain approach has gone through a long process of evolving integrating a large number of social and environmental topics. We now speak of *sustainable* value chain development. The hypothesis is that the value chain concept and development approach is here to stay, because it has a very important role to play in agri-food systems transformation toward sustainability.

Markus Hanisch presented the second hypothesis about the role of academia and research. Looking at the pressing need to arrive at fundamental changes in food systems, the role of research and academia has to change dramatically. Academia has to leave ivory towers and get much closer to the practitioner side. We have to approach stakeholders and integrate them into the research effort and we have to become much more action oriented than we have been in the past. Here is a link to the value chain approach that talks about connections. Connecting different people and institutions is really the very essence of value chain development.

During the preparation phase, we as organizers spent a long time discussing the concept of the symposium. Our decision was to structure the symposium according to six “design principles”. These are closely interconnected topics building on each other. Following is a short explanation of the rationale behind each of them.

(1) *Systems thinking*: The term “system” is the central element in the definition of an “agri-food system” (AFS). Systems thinking has to be operationalized in order to reduce complexity and to make the concept useful for science and practice likewise. We are talking too much about systems as a concept and less about applying systems thinking as a tool. How can that be done?

(2) *Linking agroecology, landscape, and nutrition with economic perspectives*: Systems descriptions depend on the perspective taken - interpreting AFS as an agroecology, as an economic system or as a politically contested field. Observers have to take position.

(3) *Securing planetary boundaries*: Systems change has to observe the planetary boundaries. Here, we face goal conflicts with social concerns. Beyond biophysical boundaries, we also see boundaries to the political enforceability of social change. How can such conflicts be handled?

(4) *Focus on impact*: The AFS, large food value chains included, are highly complex. How do we know which action will have or has had a substantial impact on the transformation process?

(5) *Working with and through change agents*: None of the players in an AFS, not even powerful politicians, will turn the world upside down on their own. Yet, some players actively drive change and cause impact. What are their characteristics?

(6) *Transformative action*: The idea is to differentiate between conventional development activities and “transformative action”. The latter are actions with planetary boundaries and radical change in mind.

### 3. Keynote speeches

#### **Keynote 1 “The role of value chain development in agri-food systems transformation”**

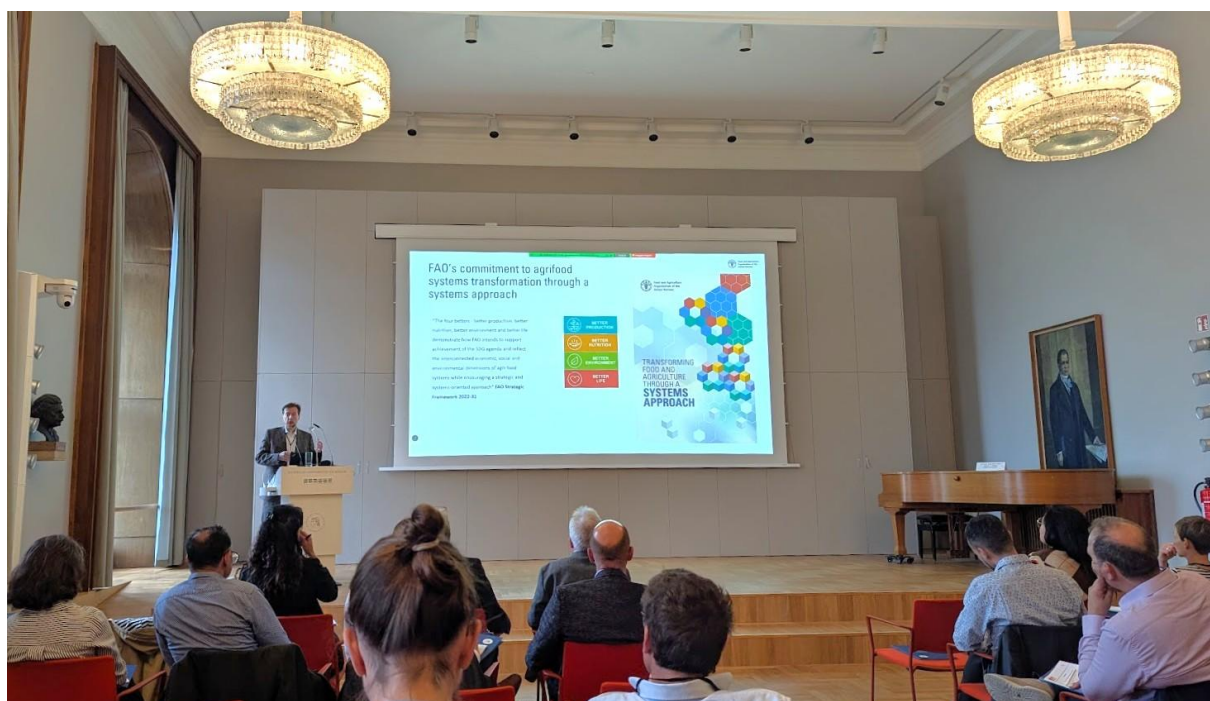
*by David Neven, Sr. Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)*

Over the last three decades, FAO has been a key player in the design of concepts guiding value chain development (Neven, 2024) and food systems transformation. David Neven presented FAO’s evolving perspective on value chain development (VCD) and its central role in transforming agri-food systems.

#### **Main points**

The presentation highlighted the need to understand value chains as complex adaptive systems and to design their development using a systems-based approach. Value chain development is often perceived as outdated, linear, and exclusively economically focused. Modern approaches, however, are systemic, participatory, and grounded in both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and take into account social, environmental, and resilience-related dimensions. The development of value

chains has shifted from treating symptoms to addressing the root causes of problems—for example, from asking “Why doesn’t a farmer use fertilizer?” to examining the political, institutional and economic conditions that prevent the use. There is a shift from expert-driven to stakeholder-driven processes, with a focus on human behaviour and adaptation rather than purely technical solutions. In addition, project implementation is shifting from direct implementation to catalytic facilitation, in which local capacities are built up gradually and made self-sustaining. FAO pursues a comprehensive approach with the *Sustainable Food Value Chain (SFVC) Framework*, which integrates six elements: Systems Thinking, Systems Investment, Systems Governance, Systems Knowledge, Systems Doing and Systems Learning. Systems thinking calls for a shift in mindset: moving away from narrow, technical perspectives toward a holistic view of the entire system and its dynamics. Systems investment emphasizes the importance of long-term public and private investments, systems governance describes the need for partnerships between public institutions, the private sector, research organizations, and other stakeholders. Systems Knowledge emphasizes the importance of qualitative and quantitative data for better understanding stakeholders and their behaviour within value chains. Systems Learning ensures continuous monitoring, adaptation, and refinement of strategies.



David Neven highlighted a two-way relationship between value chains and agri-food systems. National initiatives (e.g., capacity building, policy frameworks) provide the framework within which value chains are identified. Programs such as the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program in Zambia identify key value chains as entry points. Conversely, value chain projects contribute to system-wide change through spillovers among actors, services, and enabling environments.

Neven illustrated these principles by the Suriname pineapple value chain under FAO and UNIDO's Agri-Food System Transformation Accelerator (ASTA). The creation of a Horticultural Innovation Hub providing access to finance, knowledge, and markets transformed a fragmented sector into a more inclusive and connected system.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The conversation centered around the objectives of AFS transformation, particularly in relation to healthy diets and poverty reduction. Value chain development needs a balanced approach, which includes various dimensions including nutrition and food security.

How are the goals of food security, nutrition, and poverty reduction interconnected? The case of the pineapple value chain illustrates how transforming a specific sector of the food system can enhance the availability of food. By enabling year-round pineapple supply and creating value-added products like dried pineapple for school programs, the initiative aims to create lasting changes. Yet, impacts extend beyond pineapples, e.g. an improved quantity and quality of horticultural products in general. Equipment that has been introduced in one value chain is also used outside, in a different context.

In summary:

- Modern value chain development is not purely economic.
- Provided it embraces a systems mindset, the VC approach remains essential for transformation.
- Sustainable transformation requires partnership-led methods. There is high value in collaboration and co-creation between public, private, and research actors, and in continuous learning and adaptation as shown in longer term financial commitments by VC actors.
- The way forward is in linking value chain development and food systems research through shared evidence. The future of VCD lies in bridging research and practice, and openness to experimentation grounding systemic approaches in real-world experience.

## **Keynote 2: “20 Years of sustainable value chain development: what have we learned?”**

*by Dietmar Stoian, Lead Scientific at Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)*

Dietmar Stoian addressed the evolution and current challenges of 20 years of sustainable value chain development, focusing on what has been learnt and what remains to be learnt.

### **Main points**

Dietmar Stoian reported that since the early 2000s, huge investments have gone into value chain development. The intention was clear: improve livelihoods, markets, and rural economies. However, we don't actually know the impact very well, because there's limited rigorous evidence on outcomes.

There is a complexity dilemma: Following a comprehensive systems approach often is impractical. On the other side, reductionist approaches are overly simply and incomplete. This problem expresses itself in the disconnect between food systems and value chain thinking as well. Many NGOs still rely on their own single-tool approaches for value chain analysis, which often oversimplifies complex realities. In fact, today most food is purchased, not self-produced (~80% in some regions). That means food systems are composed of commercial value chains. Value chains are building blocks of food systems.

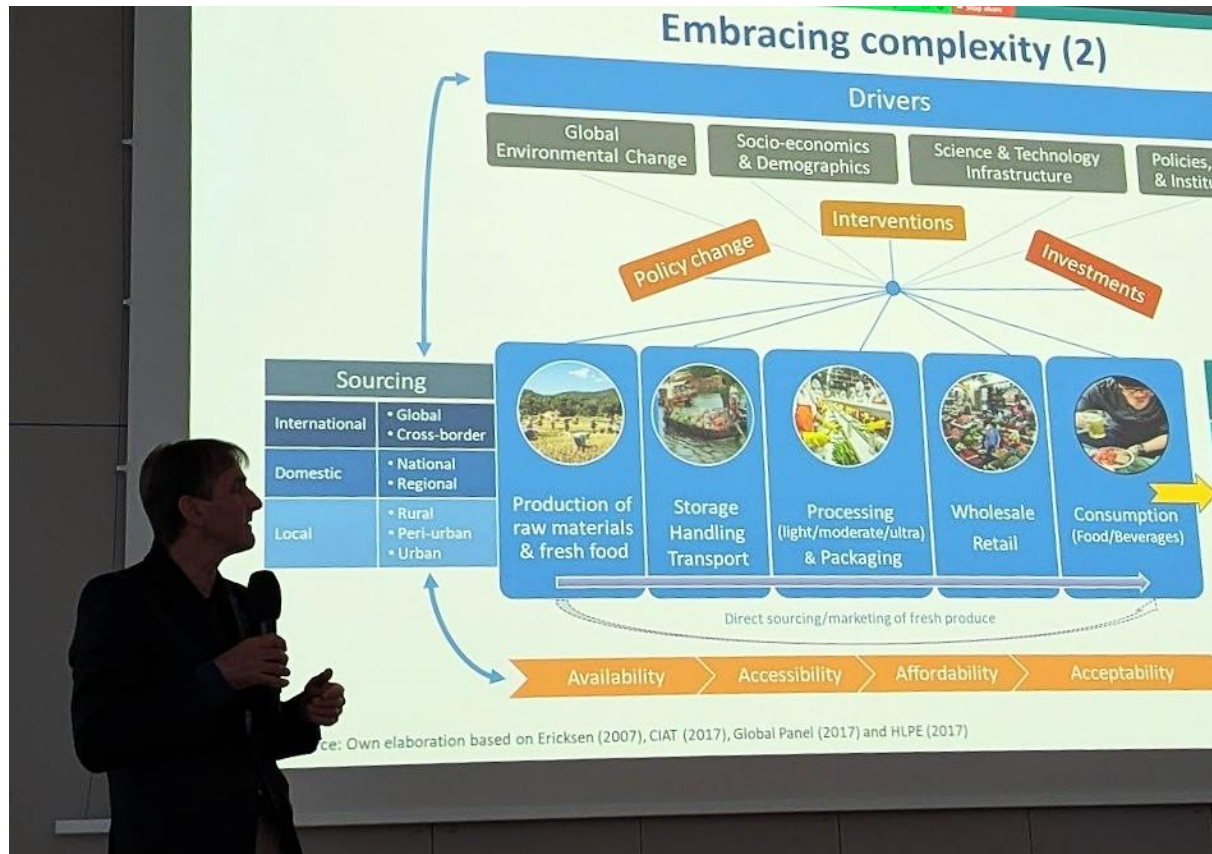
However, VCD needs to follow a multi-chain approach, instead of focusing on one value chain. Programs have to work across multiple value chains at the same time. Objectives such as gender equity cannot realistically be achieved within single value chains alone. that the landscape level is increasingly seen as crucial for building resilience and promoting inclusion. Another point is that VCD does not sufficiently account for the critical gap in some value chains., often referred to as the “missing middle”. Small- and medium-sized enterprises, especially those operating in the midstream segment as buyers, processors, and traders, play a vital role in connecting producers and consumers but are frequently overlooked in both studies and interventions.

Greater joint learning with stakeholders along the value chain is needed to address the practical “how” and “what now” questions that drive meaningful progress.

The task is to manage complexity. Stoian claims that we need to go for a middle ground between holistic thinking and practical action. It should be structured but usable, systemic but operational. This is complicated by the divide between research and practice. Researchers and practitioners operate in separate worlds. Food systems research often ignores value chains while value chain practitioners often ignore broader food systems.

New “tools” are often rebranded versions of old ones. There is competition, not collaboration. Therefore, problems are rather abandoned than solved.

Significant gaps remain in evaluating the actual impact of value chain initiatives. Systematic and credible assessments are urgently needed because most current evaluations are anecdotal or insufficiently detailed. Analyses often rely on estimates and proxy indicators.



## Discussion and conclusions

The food systems perspective differs from the VC perspective. While the former focuses on the food environment and the consumer side, value chain perspective mainly works on production, processing, and distribution efficiency. Food systems thinking can make up for this deficiency.

A major unresolved challenge is to ensure low-cost, nutritious food for consumers while also ensuring fair farmgate prices for producers. This can be addressed through working on value chain efficiency, reducing food loss and waste, improving logistics and storage and supporting food processing.

On development strategies: Past approaches often relied on direct service delivery which produced short-term gains but failed to build sustainable systems, need to strengthen systems that continue after a project ends. To address this problem and react to the shrinking development funding, the private sector is increasingly important. Projects should align with private sector initiatives and encourage co-investment. In this context, effective facilitation becomes more important than direct intervention, as researchers and practitioners focus on catalyzing local stakeholders, enabling collaboration, and building trust to ensure long-term sustainability.

In summary:

- There is a growing recognition that more systemic approaches are required. The task is to manage complexity.
- The aim should be to develop practical and adaptable approaches that work in the real world
- Value chain development has to address nutrition and livelihoods calling for a multi-chain approach.

### **Keynote 3: “Effective transformation practices”**

*by Neila Dridi, Independent consultant in value chains and entrepreneurship, Tunisia*

Neila Dridi presented practical insights on effective transformation practices in value chain development, drawing on field experience to illustrate common pitfalls and pathways toward more sustainable impact.

#### **Main points**

In her keynote, Neila Dridi emphasized that many efforts in value chain development fail, not because of missing technical solutions, but because of insufficient attention to human dynamics, stakeholder interests, and facilitation processes. Using the story of Sarah, an external facilitator of tomato value chain development in Tunisia, Neila Dridi illustrated how expert-driven approaches often overlook the deeper causes of persistent problems. Despite strong technical work and positive feedback, no meaningful improvements occurred—highlighting that technical fixes alone are insufficient when underlying coordination failures and mistrust remain unaddressed. A major challenge is the frequent tendency of coaches and development practitioners to enter discussions with pre-formulated ideas or tools, rather than listening closely to the needs, motivations, and tensions of the players involved. This leads to situations where actors verbally agree to plans but do not follow through (“say yes, do no”), where conflicts remain hidden, and where the perceived benefits of interventions do not align with stakeholders’ realities.

To overcome these pitfalls, Dridi discussed the importance of developing a set of interpersonal skills of value chain coaches that are often underestimated. Key skills of a coach include asking good questions, paraphrasing content, showing genuine interest, and understanding even unspoken opinions. Facilitation skills not only include organizing and facilitating meetings, but consensus building dealing with differing opinions and tensions. Coaches have to possess negotiation skills focusing on interests and promoting win-win solutions. Another key skill is conflict management, i.e. identifying, analyzing and mediating conflicts. Good coaches strengthen the relationships between stakeholders within the chain and also facilitate connections with stakeholders outside the value chain. Successful value chain

development relies on trust. This shift from delivering solutions *to* stakeholders to facilitating solutions *with* them emerged as a central lesson. she highlighted the necessity of aligning interventions with real incentives and capacities rather than pushing partnerships that look good on paper but lack practical viability.

Experts and moderators are typically funded by time-bound projects. Many value chain initiatives risk losing momentum once funding ends. The sustainability of value chain development beyond the lifetime of a project calls for the empowerment of *internal* coaches, who will continue the support and partnership after a project ends. Internal coaches are stakeholders from the value chain (e.g. producers, processors, cooperative members). Given the long-term nature of value chain development, such roles often extend over several years.



These practical recommendations should be used to improve the methodology and long-term effectiveness of value chain development. However, we should not forget that sustainability ultimately comes from within.

## Discussion and conclusions

A first concern refers the inclusion of informal actors. Can we ensure that we have a good representation of the informal sector? This can be

a difficulty. What counts is the qualities of actors and the suitability of partnerships. We should involve those who have the authority to decide, who have resources to support the action, and who bring in expertise. It's about being competent in transformative action.

A related topic is the payment of an internal coach once a project has ended. In the best of all cases, this person would be from the region and knowledgeable about the community. Where would be the affiliation of that person in the long term? Who pays? One possibility would be a program that has funds left for a continued coaching function. Can we expect people in a value chain to install a coach that is supposed to facilitate their decisions? Here we need a service business model under which actors in the VC would pay, and not out of goodwill.

In Tunisia this can be a sector organization, one of the existing professional associations. It's not boiling down to one person only, it's more like a collective type of management, e.g. a cooperative. External coaches can be helpful to identify these options.

Development that builds on upgrading the economic side is one thing. When it comes to transformation, considering the planetary boundaries or water issues, the inherent conflicts don't come to light.

Cooperation thus has to go beyond the specific value chain. There are other institutions, e.g. on water management with their own different interests. The question is, how these institutions interact?

In summary:

- We need to improve value chain methodologies through a stronger emphasis on a human-centered approach
- Coaches need to have strong interpersonal skills in communication, networking, negotiation skills, facilitation capacity, and conflict management
- empowerment of actors to collaboratively drive their own development, possibly facilitated by “internal coaches”

## 4. Parallel sessions

### Parallel Session 1: Systems thinking

“System” is a key term in the symposium. It is the unit of analysis and constitutes the space for action. The concept is used by many institutions and has been used as the title of the UN Food Systems Summit in New York, 2021. The description of an agri-food system (AFS) and/or a value chain system provides the reference point for analysis and action. It should reduce the overwhelming complexity into something useful for the purposes of research, public decision making and working on the ground.

How do we define this concept? Beyond saying that “everything is connected” and that the world is “very complex” what has systems thinking contributed to a better understanding of food production and consumption, in concrete terms? ... and what has it contributed to facilitate practical action? The session showed how systems thinking is currently applied. The takeaways should make systems thinking more accessible to different stakeholders.

Guiding questions included: where and how is systems thinking currently applied in VC development and AFS transformation? What constitutes a good description of an AFS or a VC? How can systems thinking help to understand and promote value chains and food systems?

#### **Input: Maryam Rezaei,**

*Lead Food Systems, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)*

The session opened with an input by Maryam Rezaei (Lead Food Systems, ODI), who highlighted that systems thinking goes beyond the notion that “everything is connected.” Instead, it serves as a practical tool to identify interlinkages, dependencies, and feedback loops within systems.

She emphasized four major challenges. First, defining system boundaries remains complex, as different observers interpret systems based on their own mandates and perspectives. Without a shared understanding of what constitutes a meaningful system representation, the usefulness of systems thinking depends on who defines the boundaries and for what purpose. Second, context is everything: the same value chain intervention can succeed in one setting and fail in another. Context specificity and inclusive design processes determine whether interventions strengthen or undermine food system resilience. While trade-offs are unavoidable, the focus should be on minimizing them rather than seeking perfect solutions. Third, many analytical frameworks remain too sophisticated for practical use. FAO's 2025 framework was cited as a valuable resource for demonstrating system approaches but lacks operational tools for practitioners, making it difficult to convince decision-makers and overcome institutional silos. Finally, a key tension persists between long-term systemic change and short-term donor expectations, with climate change identified as the ultimate disruptor that requires immediate action.

Against these challenges, the keynote suggested four quality considerations for effective system design: (1) clarifying the purpose of systems thinking (analysis, communication, or action); (2) defining system boundaries that align with available mandates and resources; (3) sharing insights from systems thinking with diverse actors; and (4) using systems thinking to identify leverage points and intervention opportunities.

## Summary of working group discussions

Following the keynote, participants reflected on the purposes of systems thinking, the challenges in its implementation, and possible solutions. Table 1 summarizes the main discussion points.

**Table1: Group work results on systems thinking**

<b>Purposes of using systems thinking</b>	<b>Challenges using systems thinking</b>	<b>Solutions / way forward</b>
<p>Better understanding...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- of systems levels from the agri-food system at the top to lower levels (value chains, regions and smaller subsystems)</li> <li>- of the complexity of interlinkages</li> </ul>	<p>Dependence on perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goal conflicts in taking perspectives: Different disciplines, interests and priorities (e.g. food security vs economic aspects) determine system descriptions</li> <li>- Complexity of agri-food systems</li> </ul>	<p>Reducing complexity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reducing complexity in a way that it serves the purpose</li> <li>- finding a balance between systems thinking and concrete action</li> <li>- Avoiding over-engineering: Find the right level of engineering</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observers may have different values, cultural differences</li> </ul> <p>Missing data and evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of tangible indicators</li> </ul>	<p>Co-creation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to come to an effective kick-off of concrete action</li> <li>- Agreement on purposes and goals</li> <li>- Incentives to collaborate</li> </ul> <p>Cultural dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- seek a common vision</li> <li>- Listen first: look at motivations and aspirations</li> </ul> <p>Quantification: collect facts and data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence-based systems thinking</li> <li>- Include qualitative and quantitative methods</li> </ul>
<p>Preparing action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Orienting practice through systems thinking</li> <li>- thinking systemically to identify entry points</li> <li>- Taking stakeholders on board</li> <li>- Placing agri-food systems in context of resilience and climate action</li> </ul>	<p>Analysis vs. action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systems thinking does not per se lead to action</li> <li>- thinking systemically has to be completed by finding specific, concrete entry points</li> </ul>	
<p>Linking actors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect smallholder farmers and enterprises in the systems analysis</li> <li>- Use systems thinking as a communication tool to visualise facts, to clarify trade-offs, and to inform policy</li> </ul>	<p>No common language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- missing glossary (or existing glossary that is not used consistently)</li> <li>- Systems thinking for communicating with decision-makers can be difficult</li> </ul>	

Systems thinking was seen as a means to understand complexity, including goal conflicts, actor interests, and the interactions between sub-systems. It helps to analyze interdependencies and feedback loops and reveals how diverse mandates and mindsets shape outcomes. Examples mentioned in the discussion included employment promotion, solar irrigation and nutrition programs.

The way boundaries are defined determines the analysis. Participants noted that diverging values and disciplinary perspectives often hinder shared understanding. Some argued that the tensions between different values should be minimized for clarity, while others suggested they should rather be embraced as part of consensus-building, enriching the diversity of perspectives.

A second purpose is to prepare and guide action. Participants discussed how to use system approaches to move from analysis to design and planning. They agreed that action follows only when the system is well understood. However, turning systemic

insights into practice remains difficult, as systems thinking often stays conceptual and lacks operational guidance. The absence of a shared language was seen as a major barrier. As one participant explained, “We do not have a common language—we come from different disciplines and schools of thinking, but we do not talk about what the term means to us.”

Participants cited a lack of reliable data and operational indicators to measure system change. Without adequate evidence, assessing or communicating impact is difficult. Participants called for evidence-based systems thinking, stronger data collection, and qualitative methods to complement quantitative indicators.

A third purpose is to show the links between actors and systems levels—from policy-makers to smallholder farmers—by mapping horizontal and vertical connections. This helps to reveal how decisions at one level influence others and supports more coherent interventions.

Finally, systems thinking was valued as a communication and coordination tool. It helps visualise linkages, highlight trade-offs, and inform policy-making, while encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration. However, communicating in terms of systems thinking remains difficult, especially with policymakers who may see it as overly complex. As one participant noted, “Using systems thinking for communication is tricky—it can be too complex, so we must think about how to reduce complexity when communicating with policymakers or the public.”

### **Solutions and way forward**

Participants agreed that complexity should be reduced to serve the purpose, balancing systemic understanding with practical application. They emphasised co-creation and participatory processes to define goals, create incentives for collaboration, and build shared visions through cultural dialogue. Evidence-based approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative data, were seen as essential for developing common understanding and guiding adaptive action.

## **Parallel session 2: Linking agroecology, food security and nutrition with economic perspectives**

The session aimed to make the tensions and trade-offs between different sustainability objectives (agroecology, food security and nutrition, and economic viability) transparent while identifying synergies and context-specific priorities. The goal was to understand how these perspectives can complement one another and guide future program design and policy frameworks. Value chain interventions usually start from particular initiatives and programs and the stakeholder organizations within these programs. It is important to understand

how the political economy of each organization influences the perspective taken, and how the interests of other stakeholders enter the development process.

Guiding questions included: Can one start from a single perspective without excluding others? What are the advantages, limitations, and risks of each entry point? And how can this inform the design of future VCD and Food System Transformation programs?

**Input: Benjamin Davies,**

*Regional Food System Advisor for Asia & South America, Welthungerhilfe*

Benjamin Davies introduced the session by reflecting on global tensions between rising food demand and ecological limits, smallholder vulnerabilities, and the conflict between short-term growth and long-term sustainability. He emphasized the need to align market and value chain incentives with the broader goals of resilient and equitable food systems.

Key messages included: markets often fail to reward agroecological public goods; farmers bear costs while benefits accrue elsewhere; and subsidies for fertilizers or export crops can undermine sustainability incentives. The central question posed was how to move from efficiency-driven to purpose-driven value chains that reward nutrition, equity, and ecology.

**Group work: Different perspectives on food system transformation**

Participants were divided into three thematic groups — Agroecology, Food Security & Nutrition, and Economy — to analyse advantages, limitations, and integration strategies for each perspective. Table 2 shows the main discussion points.

**Table 2:**

**Group work results on the three perspectives (agroecology, food security/nutrition, economy)**

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
<b>Agroecology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- puts the focus on resilience and biodiversity</li> <li>- promotes local autonomy, and</li> <li>- supports long-term sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allows for short-term income loss, and higher labour demand</li> <li>- limits attention to market incentives</li> <li>- needs policy alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incentivize ecosystem services</li> <li>- Strengthen indigenous markets,</li> <li>- Integrate nutritional and economic incentives.</li> </ul>
<b>Food security /</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- addresses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Short project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invest in diverse</li> </ul>

<b>Nutrition</b>	immediate needs - builds local food stability - provides an effective entry point for the private sector	timelines, - narrow focus on caloric intake, behavioural and market access challenges	and nutritious crops - improve stakeholder coordination, and - embed nutrition objectives in local institutions
<b>Economy</b>	- engages the private sector, - mobilizes resources, and - supports scalability	- may prioritize profit over ecological or nutritional outcomes, - risk of inequity, and short-termism	- Align economic incentives with sustainability goals, - Use sustainability reporting mechanisms, and - Strengthen governance balancing public and private goods

## Summary of working group discussions

In plenary, participants emphasized that trade-offs are context-dependent and that integration across perspectives is essential to avoid ‘window dressing’. Consensus emerged that future programs should embed sustainability principles, focus on system resilience, and evaluate impact beyond short-term outputs.

The discussion also addressed how to prioritize perspectives depending on the problem at hand and how to ensure that no dimension (economic, ecological, or nutritional) is neglected in implementation. Participants noted the need for long-term commitment and policies that reward sustainability transitions. The clusters showed strong overlaps across all perspectives, underlining the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration. Choice of perspective depends on context but must always be linked to sustainability principles.

The workshop fostered a shared understanding of the interdependence between agroecological, nutritional, and economic lenses. It highlighted that the

Future work should focus on developing typologies of entry points, improving governance mechanisms, and reforming evaluation criteria to assess whether programs truly contribute to food system transformation. Participants concluded that systemic impact requires balancing public and private interests, long-term commitment, and cross-perspective integration in value chain design.

### **Parallel session 3: Resilient food systems that keep planetary boundaries**

The workshop explored how agri-food systems (AFS) can remain resilient while respecting the planetary boundaries that safeguard Earth's stability and habitability. Participants examined how food systems can operate within ecological limits (climate, biodiversity, freshwater, and nutrient cycles) while also facing social, economic, and political limits to change. The objective was to identify key boundaries to the transformation process, the tensions and trade-offs among them, and ways to deal with the insights in value chain development (VCD) and food systems transformation.

Guiding questions included: Where are the boundaries of a “safe operating space” for agri-food systems? Which limits are absolute, and where is there room for maneuver? What do planetary boundaries imply for future policies and programs?



**Input: Niklas Kitzmann,**  
*Scientist, Institute for Climate Impact Research*

Niklas Kitzmann introduced the planetary boundaries concept as a science-based framework for defining the safe operating space for humanity. He emphasized that several boundaries (such as climate change, nutrient flows, freshwater use, and biodiversity loss) have already been crossed. Crossing tipping points such as an Amazon forest dieback would trigger irreversible impacts on global habitability and food systems. Kitzmann stressed that boundaries are not only ecological but also political, economic, and justice-related: the capacity of societies to change, access to finance, and equitable burden-sharing are limits as real as physical thresholds. Kitzmann concluded that transformation of food systems is possible within planetary boundaries if ecological constraints, governance, and social justice are addressed in parallel.

**Group work: Discussion of boundaries and conflicts**

Participants discussed the planetary boundaries of agri-food systems in connection with fundamental barriers to transformation. The concept of planetary boundaries describes the safe *biophysical* operating space. The political scope for action may be similarly restrictive. Compliance with planetary boundaries gives rise to associated socioeconomic conflicts which themselves constitute boundaries within which decision-makers have to operate.

Typical conflicts include land competition (production vs. conservation), short-term growth vs. long-term resilience, and governance instability limiting towards sustainability.

**Summary of working group discussions**

In plenary, participants clustered and reinterpreted the pinboard cards to synthesize lessons for practice. The exercise revealed that boundaries are closely connected.

**Table 3:**  
**Group work results on generic boundaries to transformation**

Statements on boundaries	Discussion
Biophysical planetary boundaries to change of particular relevance for agri-food systems, i.e. boundaries to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Climate change (staying within the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement)</li> <li>- Change in biosphere integrity</li> <li>- Modification of biogeochemical flows</li> </ul>	The different categories of boundaries are interconnected. They reinforce each other: breaching one increases pressure on others.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Freshwater change</li> <li>- Land use change</li> </ul>	<p>All boundaries have to be addressed likewise. There is no hierarchy.</p>
<p>Socioeconomic barriers that can become boundaries to transformational change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Societal acceptance of change</li> <li>- Limits of what policy-making can achieve, lack of political will, fiscal boundaries</li> <li>- institutional resilience against change, weak regulatory framework</li> <li>- Food security</li> </ul>	<p>We need to break down the analysis to specific agri-food systems, countries and regions.</p> <p>The effects are not felt directly.</p> <p>Responsibility is diluted.</p> <p>Roles of actors unclear</p>

**Table 4:**  
**Group work results on ecological and social conflicts**

<b>Ecological and Social Conflicts</b>	<b>Recommendations related to the handling of conflicts</b>
<p>Conflicts around natural resource use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land use conflicts (incl. land rights)</li> <li>- Conflicts related to production of renewable energy (e.g. bioeconomy)</li> <li>- Adaptation to climate change vs. mitigation</li> <li>- biodiversity protection supports resilience but can limit income unless incentives align.</li> <li>- Others, tbd</li> </ul> <p>Issues of social justice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Climate justice (causing climate change vs. suffering from cc)</li> <li>- Social justice (degree to which people are affected by cc and/or obliged to mitigate)</li> <li>- Unequal distribution of costs and benefits of sustainability transformation</li> </ul>	<p>Triggers / leverage points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Find <i>triggers</i> that lead to system change</li> <li>- Small and easy levers (“low-hanging fruit”)</li> <li>- Explore synergies</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Action points for VC development and AFS transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embed justice and equity in program design.</li> <li>- Trade-offs must be made transparent</li> <li>- Boundaries should be framed as guides for innovation, not as barriers to development.</li> <li>- Build stability of the financial system, finance the transition to more resilient agri-food systems, micro loans, cooperatives</li> <li>- Strengthen governance capacities and coordination across scales</li> <li>- Take action with different lenses - macro, meso, micro</li> <li>- VCD and food systems projects should integrate checks on biophysical boundaries (climate, water, soil, biodiversity) in planning and monitoring</li> <li>- “Pilot, Prove, Scale” concept making success visible</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply the “Human Rights Framework”</li> <li>- Empower local actors as co-creators of transformation, not mere implementers.</li> </ul>
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Social conflicts are severe barriers to agri-food system transformation. Governance gaps are critical: unclear responsibilities and fragmented mandates can halt transformation even when solutions are known. Equity is essential: transformation must include those most affected by boundary transgressions and ensure access to climate finance.

The session concluded that resilient food systems depend on recognizing both natural and societal limits. Staying within planetary boundaries requires adaptive governance, inclusive decision-making, and fair resource allocation. Boundaries are not constraints to growth but signposts for sustainable transformation. Participants agreed that future programs must integrate ecological, political, and financial limits instead of treating them separately.

## **Parallel Session 4: Staying focused on impact**

Session 4 focused on how Value Chain Development (VCD) can maintain a strong focus on impact, both in relation to broader food system transformation (FST) and within specific VCD interventions. More specifically, the session explored how impact is currently measured, where gaps remain, and what can be improved.

Participants discussed major success and failure stories, approaches to assessing system change, and the need for suitable evaluation criteria and indicators. The session also examined how VCD stakeholders can better align impact measurement with their contribution to FST and what recommendations are needed for both M&E practitioners and decision-makers.

Guiding questions included: What is our experience with the impact of development policies on VC/AFS? Impact of VCD? How do we usually measure VCD impact and how can we measure transformative impact? (given the complexity of VC and AFS systems) Does the evaluation of transformative (open ended) impact have to follow a different (procedural) logic?

### **Input: Ruerd Ruben Emeritus**

*Special Professor, Wageningen University, Netherlands*

The keynote stressed that placing value chain development within broader food systems greatly increases complexity, especially because behavioural motivations remain poorly understood and causality is difficult to establish without panel data. Many persistent problems reappear because underlying structural drivers are not

addressed, requiring solutions outside the immediate problem area and better integration of technological and behavioural change.

Ruben highlighted common pitfalls: production-focused projects can harm women, certification schemes often exclude smallholders, and value added frequently shifts to midstream actors, generating social and environmental externalities. Evidence across economic, social, and political dimensions shows recurring challenges—short-term price gains followed by long-term volatility, limited consumer willingness to pay, fragile trust between actors, and persistent power asymmetries that call for moving from *fair trade* to *fair chain* thinking.

A systems approach, he argued, requires understanding the drivers of system performance, recognising feedbacks, and seeking “system solutions” rather than isolated fixes. Future research should prioritise behavioural drivers such as trust and compliance, explore unconventional entry points, and focus on justice in value chain relationships. Policy should promote full-chain responsibility, from CO<sub>2</sub> and deforestation to decent labour and responsible entrepreneurship under emerging due diligence legislation.

### **Sub-session 1: How to measure transformative impact?**

Participants agreed that measuring transformative impact requires first defining the system boundaries, purpose, and audience of the assessment. Transformation cannot be measured without understanding why change is not occurring, which calls for a clear theory of change rather than relying solely on baselines or activity counts. Key impact areas must be identified, aligned with stakeholder goals, and grounded in a credible problem statement.

The group highlighted tensions between donor expectations for simple indicators and the complexity of transformation processes. Credibility and transparency were seen as essential, particularly given incentives to report positive results and the frequent lack of follow-up (e.g., in training initiatives). Participants also stressed the need to consider behavioural factors, distributive impacts—including gender dynamics—and the cost and feasibility of data collection, while making use of existing datasets and digital tools.

Ultimately, transformative impact depends on clearly defined goals, ambitious yet realistic indicators, and changes that become embedded in society. Measurement must capture both local, incremental improvements and broader system-level effects.

**Table 5:**

**Group work results on how to measure transformative impact**

<b>How can we measure transformative impact?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Define the system first</li><li>● Identify the audience</li><li>● Understand why transformation is NOT happening (develop a theory of change)</li><li>● Identify key impact areas (e.g. nutrition, environment, economic); Is there a minimum requirement?</li><li>● Define the goal → depending on the goal, select value chains with high impact (on a national level)</li><li>● Benchmarking: competing interventions, comparing the costs</li></ul>

**Sub-session 2: What tools and data do we use to measure impacts?**

The discussion highlighted the importance of conceiving monitoring and evaluation (M&E) not just as a reporting tool but as a way to steer projects and learn from them. A main suggestion was to build a program portfolio that lasts in the long term with shorter, focused projects, planning M&E from the start to enable methods like outcome harvesting that capture both intended and unintended results. Key outcomes should be co-created with stakeholders to ensure relevance and track sustainability in the post-project phase. Lessons learned should be systematically integrated into future initiatives, as they are often more valuable than indicators themselves. The group recognized ongoing challenges in ensuring systemic transformation rather than isolated change, including sustaining outcomes after project completion and addressing the underlying forces that keep established systems in place or prevent transformation from happening.

**Summary of working group discussions**

The group emphasized that effective impact measurement and project steering require a deeper understanding of what keeps existing systems in place, rather than focusing solely on desired changes. Participants highlighted the value of co-creating indicators with stakeholders so as to ensure relevance and practical applicability. They called for integrating a research component into value chain intervention planning. Learning is enhanced when project designs include variation and multiple intervention approaches, supported by systematic documentation of successes and failures.

Alignment between project timelines and research timelines was considered essential, as was securing programmatic funding that enables ex-post evaluations. Monitoring and evaluation should function as a management tool, strengthened by the new opportunities offered by digitization. Finally, participants stressed the need for flexibility amid increasing innovation and climate-related pressures, and reiterated that understanding whether outcomes result from the intervention or the context is more valuable than reaching large numbers without generating meaningful insights.

As a concluding remark, the session called for more flexible and process-oriented evaluation, a stronger focus on behavioural aspects, and openness to unusual solutions, assessing justice in value chain relationships shifting from 'fair trade' to 'fair change.'

## ***Second day of the symposium***

The organizers started the second day of the symposium by thanking the participants for their vivid engagement in the discussion. The first day was characterized by a highly productive atmosphere throughout all sessions. Keynote presentations and working group sessions raised important points and insights documented in a growing gallery of pinboards. The procedure of the first day – keynotes followed by parallel sessions was continued during the morning. The afternoon was dedicated to debate in plenary.

## **Parallel Session 5: Working with change agents**

Development depends on the continuous improvement of practices. Some VC actors are particularly innovative and thus can initiate and speed up change, in different ways. The concept of “change agent” has implications for development policy and programs because it assigns them an particular role.

Change agents are the protagonists of transformation. Who are they? Are the ideas of individual pioneers scalable? Can we rely on self-organized change?

This session aimed to build a shared understanding of what defines true change agents who have the capacity to drive sustainability transformation.

Guiding questions included: What do we mean by “change agent”? What criteria can we use to determine whether an individual or an organisation actually *is* a change agent in the agri-food system? Is there a group of potential change agents (e.g. political decision-makers, administration, local communities, public research, banks, companies, private associations) that can be considered particularly effective?

**Input: G.B. Banjara,**

*Project Manager, Farmers’ Organisation for Rural Transformation (FORT), Uganda*

GB Banjara, a project manager with 15 years of experience in rural development and value chain projects, shared reflections on the nature of change agents. He defined a change agent, with the help of ChatGPT, as an individual, group, or organization that acts as a catalyst to initiate, facilitate, and drive positive change within a system, such as a business or organization. Key attributes of change agents include leadership, communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving, and the ability to inspire others. They can be internal, like employees or managers, or external, like consultants, bringing both expertise and new perspectives to the process.

Drawing from his career, Banjara identified multiple change agents across countries and projects, including seed suppliers, export boards, private sector operators, vocational schools, and innovative youth entrepreneurs, emphasizing that change arises from multiple actors working within and outside formal projects.

Banjara raised critical questions about who truly drives change—the projects, organizations, or individual players—and underscored the complexity of supporting and engaging change agents effectively. While not providing definitive answers, Banjara’s insights invite reflection on the multifaceted roles change agents play in transforming agricultural value chains and rural systems, and how projects might better recognize and collaborate with these dynamic forces to foster sustainable change.

**Table 6:**  
**Group work results on types and characteristics of change agents**

<b>Types of change agents</b>	<b>Characteristics of change agents</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
Nearly anyone can (or has) become a change agent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Political leaders</li><li>- Government administration e.g. agric offices</li><li>- Associations at meso level, e.g. export boards</li><li>- Large and small enterprises</li></ul>	Typical traits of Change agents... <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- have a vision of change beyond their own role</li><li>- act intentionally</li><li>- compromise</li><li>- Take risk</li><li>- are assertive, exert compliance</li><li>- have power &amp; mandate</li><li>- generate connections,</li></ul>	Conditions of becoming a change agent <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- access to resources</li><li>- basic infrastructure</li><li>- opportunity</li></ul> Being a change agent <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- often unintentional process, chain of events</li><li>- not alone, there are many change agents</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multinational companies</li> <li>- Research institutes</li> <li>- Public programs and projects</li> <li>- Civil society -NGOs</li> <li>- Media (press, social media influencers)</li> <li>- Consumer groups</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">bring people together, catalyst role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- possess entrepreneurial attitude</li> <li>- take an advocacy role</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">As individuals: personality, motivation, values and vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sparking vs. caring about change</li> <li>- incremental change can lead to radical change</li> <li>- Change agents change themselves through time</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">Supporting a change agent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- change agents can be created</li> <li>- looking left and right: There are many (potential) change agents</li> <li>- adapt and be prepared to (ex)change your change agent</li> <li>- Avoid prejudices (there are no good or bad ones)</li> </ul>
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## Summary of working group discussions

The group concluded that change agents are not singular but exist at multiple levels—micro, meso, and macro. Change does not necessarily start at the top or with the public sector. A key question is how to effectively connect and coordinate among these levels. The group members recognized that change agents can be created and evolve over time, which requires adaptability in deciding which change agents to engage with during different phases.

Importantly, the concept of a change agent extends beyond individuals or organizations; it can also be a process, a place, or even an unintentional factor driving change. This broader understanding encourages flexible approaches to working with and through change agents.

## Parallel Session 6: Transformative action

**Input: Kossi Apedo,**

*National Coordinator at GIZ, SSAB, Togo*

Transformative action is about rethinking the way food value chains are structured. Food value chains have to transform fundamentally towards keeping planetary boundaries, sustainability of resource use and social inclusivity. The question is what constitutes a *transformative* action and when an intervention can truly be considered transformative instead of just improving a given situation. The difference is blurred.

## Summary of working group discussions

The questions guiding the discussion included: What are the key drivers of transformative action in food systems? How can value chain design be rethought? And how can stakeholders work together to achieve transformative outcomes? Participants shared concrete, field-based examples and further reflected on what characterizes these cases as transformative or capable of generating fundamental change.

Four examples of value chains were discussed, each of which recently went through a series of actions that may (or not) be considered transformative. A number of points made by the participants referred to factors that enable transformation rather than to the action itself.

<b>Value chain</b>	<b>Transformative actions (and/or enabling factors)</b>	<b>Result observed</b>	<b>Relevance for transformation (incomplete)</b>
Organic pineapple, Togo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve access to information, land &amp; financial resources</li> <li>- Organization of producers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Growing scale of organic production (share of 20%)</li> <li>- Greater awareness &amp; ownership</li> </ul>	- ?
Seaweed, Zanzibar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop processing technology to add value</li> <li>- Trials to de-risk production (UNIDO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technological innovation</li> <li>- Investment by private enterprises</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social inclusion? vs.</li> <li>- Preservation of coral reefs?</li> </ul>
Organic bananas, Costa Rica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National organic production as point of departure</li> <li>- Presence of alternative markets</li> <li>- Buyers' interest in long-term relations to cooperatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market links to schools (for school feeding)</li> </ul>	- Improved nutrition?
Traditional green leafy vegetables, (GLV) Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create recipes for complementary feeding</li> <li>- GLV as nat'l heritage</li> <li>- Facilitation and promotion, sensitization, awareness raising</li> <li>- Availability of GLV</li> <li>- Processing technique</li> <li>- ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Novel recipes for complementary feeding</li> <li>- Food consumption is perceived differently</li> <li>- Skills acquired</li> </ul>	- Improved nutrition?

The relevance of transformative actions for the transformation process has not been discussed in detail during the group work. Obviously, it varies considerably.

The second part of the working group discussions discussed one specific transformative action that cuts across value chains – the introduction of front-of-package warning labels in Chile and Mexico.

Transformative action	Enabling factors	Result observed
Introducing front-of-package warning labels in Chile and Mexico (nutrient content of foods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- External enforcement, policies and laws</li> <li>- Adaptive response of consumers</li> <li>- Applicable to diverse types of food</li> <li>- Conflict with branding = disincentive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Market transparency</li> <li>- Open information</li> </ul>

## Gallery of working group results

The results of all six parallel sessions had been documented on pinboards. These were exhibited as a gallery in the meeting hall, so that participants had a chance to check on the results of parallel sessions, in which they did not participate.



## 5. Summary of interim results by the organizers

Markus Hanisch and Andreas Springer-Heinze summarized the outcomes of the first day. In addition to the documentation of the parallel sessions, which were displayed on the gallery of pinboards, the organizers attempted to take stock of the results. Both noted that the sheer number of experiences and arguments gathered in the discussion made it difficult to come up with an unambiguous message. At this stage, the synthesis was still pending; conclusions could only be drawn in the final plenary session.

Andreas Springer Heinze commented that the boundaries of an agri-food system are wide - even too wide if we look at the level where decisions are actually taken. Many of the issues and solutions put forward in the symposium refer to the agri-food value chains, be it in technology, finance or resource management issues and not to the AFS at large. He sees the importance of value chains reconfirmed.

How do value chains relate to the agri-food system? To link the two levels, he referred back to three terms that had be learned yesterday.

He started with the expression “zooming out” and “zooming in” that he learned at the evening reception the day before. He stressed that this image is a good expression of how one should work with systems. You can go out to be as broad as you can to get the full picture, to be holistic. And then you go back and zoom in into particular subsystems, such as a specific value chain.

The next expression refers to the “right level of engineering”. There was talk of the risk of over-engineering, the conception of projects that go too far in an attempt to control the transformation process. You don't want to overdo. You want the right level of engineering - something that we can actually handle in practice.

The third term is what has been called the “missing middle”. In the context of the symposium objectives, this means finding the right level of abstraction so that observers and practitioners won't go up to high-flying ideas, but also not become too specific to lose themselves in small issues. So, this is where the value chains come in, and he thinks this is what we have to do.

Markus Hanisch came back to the hypothesis Andreas and himself had mentioned at the Symposium introduction: Value Chain Development will continue to play an important role in the food systems transformation discussion and conceptualization. In his view, this clearly came out of the lessons learnt from both keynotes and the sessions discussing system thinking, planetary boundaries, resilience and the need to focus on impact. He mentioned his own learnings, for example the idea of heatmaps and hotspots. A takeaway from the second keynote made us aware of the repeated weaknesses in value chain development, the problems with measuring impacts and the white spots in value chain thinking that often leave us without a clear integration of what happens between farmers and the supermarkets.

## 6. Plenary Session: Transformative value chains – the next generation

Prof. Bijman opened the afternoon plenary session with an additional keynote address. Its purpose was to identify user groups for the symposium's findings and discuss their roles.

### **Keynote “The role of role of organizations and collaboration in agri-food systems transformation”**

*Jos Bijman, Ass. Professor of Cooperative Organisations, Wageningen University*

Jos Bijman reflected on the role of organizations, firms, and structural conditions in value chain development, emphasizing the need for realistic, organization-centred and system-aware approaches.

#### **Main points**

Jos Bijman argued that value chains themselves are not actors—organizations and the people within them are the ones making decisions, setting strategies, and shaping outcomes. For him, effective value chain development requires a stronger focus on the capabilities, interests, and limitations of these organizations. Businesses such as cooperatives in particular should not be romanticized: while increasingly interested in sustainability, their primary mandate remains economic performance, which developers must take into account.

He made the case that midstream businesses—processors, traders, wholesalers—are often the crucial leverage points in value chains. These firms connect supply and demand, possess entrepreneurial capabilities, and can act as powerful change agents if appropriately engaged. Starting interventions with these actors, rather than exclusively with producers or consumers, can therefore yield more impactful and realistic change dynamics.

At the same time, Bijman stressed that farmers should be recognized as entrepreneurs, not as passive recipients of development support. Farms are firms, and the diversity among producers—in terms of capabilities, risk tolerance, and strategic orientation—needs to be acknowledged.

Producer organizations and cooperatives also play a vital role as business-oriented collective structures capable of counterbalancing the market power of midstream firms. They can provide services, improve bargaining power, and act as important institutional anchors—but only if understood and supported as economic, not merely social, entities.

He further highlighted the significance of the state, whose regulatory framework, stability, and financial instruments shape the long-term conditions for change. Similarly, the availability of finance—public, private, or blended—is a key enabler for transformation, particularly for small and medium enterprises and farmer organizations.

## Discussion

Prof. Bijman called for a more analytically grounded and evidence-based approach to value chain transformation. He emphasized the need for thorough contextual understanding—beyond simple mapping—of incentives, path dependencies, and organizational constraints that determine what kinds of change are actually feasible.

He encouraged practitioners to “keep it simple” by setting clear priorities in a context where concepts such as transformation and food systems are becoming increasingly complex. Not all ambitions can be pursued at once, and not everything belongs in a single project. Practical, realistic interventions are needed, informed by long-term engagement rather than short project cycles.



Learning from past initiatives remains limited, and Bijman stressed the importance of collecting and sharing experiences more systematically. He also called for more rigorous qualitative research, which, when methodologically sound, can be as impactful as quantitative studies—particularly for understanding behaviours, relationships, and organizational decision-making.

Overall, his contribution underscored the importance of grounding value chain development in organizational realities, strengthening the role of businesses and cooperatives, and investing in long-term, context-sensitive, and evidence-based approaches that can support meaningful transformation.

## **Plenary Workshop: The changing roles of actors in value chain development**

Building on earlier discussions, participants engaged in an interactive group exercise to identify what needs to change to make value chain transformation truly transformative. It utilized the “World Café” format. In this method, participants divided themselves into groups according to their areas of activity. Five areas of action emerged – public policy, research, concept development, training & consulting and program management. The workshop focused on conclusions for the work of these stakeholder groups.

Each group gathers around a separate table and elaborates recommendations for its own work. These are noted on a sheet of paper placed on the table. Subsequently, all groups move on from the table they started with to the next where they can add comments or give further recommendations on the same sheet- Switching from one table to the next the paper is gradually filled up with recommendations to the original group. In this way, rather than making general recommendations, the specific expectations of each of the five interest groups are compiled. After the rotation was completed, each group consolidated and prioritized its findings, identifying the most critical shifts in practice, mindsets, and structures needed to advance transformation.

The following summaries capture the main outcomes of these final discussions, outlining the central focus areas and directions for change that emerged across all perspectives. These results served as the foundation for the subsequent session on principles and quality criteria for transformative value chain systems.

### **Public Policy**

The discussion focused on the role of government in shaping an enabling environment for value chain transformation and identified three key areas for public sector intervention:

1. Legislation and regulation – establishing a level playing field through legal frameworks, regulatory standards, and product surveillance (e.g. black warning labels for unhealthy products).
2. Finance and incentives – providing insurance schemes, tax incentives, and subsidies to manage risks associated with transformation.
3. Public investment – recognising that many innovations originate from public rather than private investment, particularly in education, research, health, and infrastructure.

The results also emphasised the importance of developing outside options, such as migration and non-agricultural employment opportunities, to improve nutrition

outcomes by diversifying household income sources. During the discussion, it was clarified that this approach does not imply reduced investment in agriculture but highlights that income diversification often leads to better nutrition, while sustained investment in agriculture remains vital for economic growth and resource management.

Legislation and education were identified as priority entry points for public action, supported by financial instruments and cross-sector coordination to create a more inclusive and resilient value chain environment.

## **Research**

The group focused on strengthening the relevance, communication, and contextual understanding of research for value chain transformation. Three main priorities were identified:

1. Transdisciplinary research with stakeholders – research should be co-created by actors from policy, practice and communities to ensure relevance, mutual learning, and practical impact. This approach encourages researchers to translate findings into actionable recommendations rather than focusing solely on academic publications.
2. Research communication and data sharing – communication should extend beyond scientific journals to include policy briefs, professional exchanges, and open-access data. Participants highlighted the importance of sharing both quantitative and qualitative data to avoid duplication and enhance collective learning
3. Understanding actors in context – research should analyse existing systems, institutions, and incentives that shape behaviour before designing interventions.

In the discussion, participants underlined the need to combine interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, noting that universities still reward publications over societal impact. Examples from the Netherlands showed emerging shifts toward recognizing societal relevance in academic careers. Participants also debated the question how to distinguish between failures caused by the intervention or the context, calling for comparative, mixed-method analyses to strengthen causal understanding and improve the design of context-sensitive value chain research.

## **Concept development**

The group focused on principles for concept design and implementation in value chain transformation. Three priorities:

1. Participatory and inclusive design – concepts should be developed jointly with all relevant stakeholders, including farmers, private enterprises and public institutions. Early inclusion ensures relevance, ownership and responsiveness to stakeholder needs.
2. Adaptive learning – concepts should be designed as flexible and iterative processes that allow continuous reflection, learning and adjustment based on stakeholder feedback and changing contexts. This requires mechanisms for monitoring, revisiting assumptions and adapting interventions when necessary.
3. System-based solutions and long-term structures – interventions should be embedded in existing systems and institutional frameworks to ensure continuity, scalability and sustainability beyond project duration.



In the discussion, questions centred on managing stakeholder expectations in participatory design— particularly when stakeholders prioritise short-term needs such as equipment or inputs. Responses highlighted the importance of clear communication, expectation management and demonstration or pilot approaches to test ideas and

build shared understanding. Setting boundaries from the start and clarifying what is feasible within available resources were seen as essential for maintaining trust and ensuring realistic, system-oriented outcomes.

## **Training and consulting**

The group focused on principles for effective training and capacity development in value chain transformation. Three priorities again:

1. Co-creation of training content and design – training should be developed through a participatory process involving trainees and relevant stakeholders from the outset. Joint design ensures relevance, builds ownership, and supports a clear follow-up process.
2. Practical, hands-on learning – training should emphasize learning by doing, simulations, and peer-to-peer exchange, keeping theoretical input short and

directly linked to real-world tasks. Content should strengthen the specific skills participants need to perform in their professional roles.

3. Follow-up and outcome monitoring – training effectiveness should be assessed through post-training follow-up that tracks changes in participants' behaviour and practice over time.

In the discussion, participants clarified that “more practical” refers to task-oriented learning closely connected to participants' professional contexts, complemented by concise theory delivered through supporting materials. The group also reflected on the increasing role of digital learning, noting that well-designed online modules—featuring motivational elements, exercises and personalised support—can effectively complement face-to-face approaches. Overall, the group stressed that co-creation, practical application and sustained follow-up are key to meaningful training outcomes.

## **Program Management**

The group focused on the evolving role of management and facilitation in value chain transformation. Five points emerged:

1. Co-creation as a management principle – ownership and effectiveness depend on maintaining participatory approaches throughout the entire project cycle, not only at the design stage. Managers should act as facilitators who engage stakeholders continuously.
2. Flexibility in project implementation – transformative change requires managers to operate beyond rigid project boundaries (e.g. fixed value chains or target groups) and adapt to emerging realities.
3. Transformative vision – management should pursue a long-term systems perspective, ensuring that short-term project goals contribute to broader transformational aims.
4. Soft skills – interpersonal, facilitation, and communication skills are critical for navigating complexity, fostering collaboration, and sustaining motivation across partners.
5. Absence of formal management roles – in some contexts, value chains function without a central manager. In such cases, collective facilitation and informal leadership are needed to maintain direction and drive transformation.

In the discussion, participants reflected on the economic sustainability of management and facilitation functions, particularly after donor-funded interventions end. Strengthening business models, cost-sharing, and exit strategies was seen as essential to ensure continuity beyond project lifecycles.

## 7. Findings of the symposium

The symposium concluded with reflections revisiting the symposium's initial hypotheses and assessing what was achieved. To wrap up the results, the two organizers of the symposium engaged in a public dialogue closing the circle. Finally, each participant contributed with their main takeaway.

### Conclusions of the organizers

Andreas Springer-Heinze classified the quest for transformation as a truly wicked problem, because of its all-embracing nature. It is also wicked in the sense that, first of all, we have to keep the planetary boundaries. And more than that, cope with political challenges that are very hard to handle. There is no big solution to the challenge. Real change comes through many small, concrete improvements and individual solutions, rather than one grand plan. We must take action in a variety of ways keeping the big picture of the AFS in mind. Good examples, solutions and recommendations were put forward during the symposium. We have to view them as a whole. It is precisely the sum of the individual efforts that makes the difference and drives transformation. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts".

The second learning is the need to be adaptive, react to opportunities, take chances, stay flexible. We have seen in parallel session 5 that this is what change agents are made of. An adaptive approach also applies to the different perspectives on AFS to choose from. Doing the right thing means looking beyond a value chain and beyond the landscape. This implies crossing the limits of one's own perspective.

The multi-perspective approach has to do with the famous notion of co-creation. This is an implication of the point above - reacting to opportunities. That means we have to involve the change agents, those who are actually doing something, whatever their role is. They need to be supported according to what they have to bring in.

Another insight is the need to be understandable to the people we are working with, in analysis, management, and in the debates on agri-food systems and transformation. To be understood is extremely important for success. Many stakeholders would find it extremely hard to follow when we use abstractions such as systems, transformation etc. Even in the preparation of this symposium, we found it difficult to come to grips with the complexity. We have to go for a kind of presentation, a kind of analysis, a kind of description, that is accessible.

Referring to the lead question of the symposium – the role of value chain development in agri-food systems transformation - Andreas Springer-Heinze stressed again the problem of the "missing middle". In his keynote, Dietmar Stoian had called for a middle ground between reductionist approaches and complex systems approaches. We can take that further and address the missing middle between the overarching concept of an agri-food system and concrete action on the ground. In fact, value chains have exactly that middle position. They form part of the

agri-food system, and they are the level at which the relevant practical issues pop up, from resource management to nutrition education. Value chains thus are useful entry points to development action within the context of the larger food system.

Markus Hanisch reflected on the success and collaborative spirit of the event. He referred to the initial question of the symposium whether value chain development or value chain thinking will stay relevant in the realms of food system transformation. The answer: Definitely there's a yes. We will not get rid of it. We will have to do with it. We'll have to improve it.

On one side, we have to stay holistic in the development of the value chain, and we have to encompass the whole complexity at stake, but on the other side, we can only be a small part of the transformative change that we are actually aiming at. So, we will always stay gradual. The term for this is transformative value chain development, maintaining a holistic view without expecting any single intervention to fully achieve transformative change.

There are many ways to be transformative and there are many alleys towards reaching an impact in the food system. The types of value chains and examples cited by the participants highlight the value of diverse approaches and critical reflection—projects aiming at behavioural change, projects addressing multifaceted impacts, as well as projects that truly focus on a single impact and action that is easy to manage.

## **Key takeaways of participants**

All attendees were asked to share their most important insight. Here are the responses, grouped by similarity.

### **... on agri-food systems and value chains**

- A systems-based approach to value chain development is increasingly becoming the norm.
- Food systems consist of many interconnected value chains that must become more sustainable and inclusive.
- The value chain approach remains a practical entry point for achieving system-level impact.
- Value chain development has many meanings – this diversity is both a threat and an opportunity.
- The value chain concept remains powerful, but innovative approaches are still lacking.



### ... on the transformation process

- Transformation can start in one area and influence others; change spreads across system levels.
- Transformation starts with self-change – rethinking one’s own ways of working.
- Even small levers can have big impacts – identifying them is crucial for transformation.
- Context is everything – there is no one-size-fits-all solution.
- Change agents are key to driving transformation processes.
- Co-creation was identified as a transformative tool in its own right

### ... on the principles of engaging in transformative action

- Think big, act small – combine ambition with practical, context-specific action.
- Keep a big vision, but question your own assumptions continuously.
- The balance between big-picture thinking and local action remains crucial.
- A shared and well-structured vision is essential for advancing sustainable value chains.
- Despite different perspectives, the group recognized the need for a common vision for transformation.
- Listening, acting, and being agile are essential for adaptive management.
- Let’s not forget the values and the chains.
- Projects should create space for learning and reflection throughout their implementation.

- Projects should include post-completion learning phases to analyse and learn from previous initiatives.

### ... on the implications for research and practice

- The process presents new challenges for researchers
- The collective workshop results are “homework” for future development efforts.
- Closer links between research and practice can strengthen transformative value chains.
- Collaboration between academia and practitioners is indispensable for progress.
- Communication matters – both with policymakers, funders, and within the professional community.
- Transdisciplinary collaboration and mutual learning should guide future projects.

Lastly, as an ongoing learning process, all participants were encouraged to further develop guiding principles collectively rather than declaring definitive conclusions from the symposium on future value chain development.

## Farewell

The organizers thanked all participants for their engaged and creative contributions. They expressed genuine appreciation for how much was accomplished in just two days. It was a real pleasure working together.

Looking back at our initial hypotheses and expectations, we can say that the symposium has been a step forward towards integrating the VC and AFS concepts. It has produced a long list of takeaways. These results can and should be applied on both sides – academia and development practice.

There is no blueprint for a new generation of value chain development. We have decided to stick to a series of takeaways rather than coming to a finished result. It has been told that agri-food system transformation is a truly wicked problem. This is the condition we have to live with. Yet don't let the big challenges get out of sight.

# Annex

- Program of the Symposium
- List of participants

## **Contact information / imprint**

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## Symposium

### “The role of value chain development in agri-food systems transformation”

September 22-23, 2025 | Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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Current agri-food systems (AFS) are contributors to global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and malnutrition. Furthermore, they are sources of increasing social conflict over natural resource use. Simultaneously, these systems are highly vulnerable to global warming, armed conflicts, and water scarcity. Thus, AFS must undergo profound transformation to effectively address hunger and malnutrition and to ensure the wellbeing of global ecosystems. However, this overdue paradigm shift remains contested. Divergent narratives compete over the most appropriate pathways for change, and powerful vested interests at times counter transformation efforts.

Over the past three decades, value chain approaches and value chain development (VCD) have become central frameworks for a large community of practitioners aiming to improve the socio-economic conditions of value chain stakeholders, particularly smallholder farmers in rural areas. Despite widespread adoption, VCD projects have repeatedly yielded mixed evaluation results. Apart from the many successes, some projects have failed to achieve the intended outcomes, have negatively impacted social and ecological contexts, or have been criticized for lacking practical relevance and scalability. Although recent AFS transformation frameworks commonly place value chains at their core, the role of VCD in AFS transformation remains unclear.

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#### Objectives

The primary objective of the symposium is to foster structured dialogue and collaboration between researchers and value chain practitioners. The event aims to produce insights on the evolving roles of VCD actors from academia, practice and policy making, in order to discuss their instruments, best practice experience and methods that can inform and shape the next generation of value chain policies and programs conducive to AFS transformation.

## **Participants**

The symposium will take place at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (main building) over the course of two consecutive days, and will convene approximately 40 invited international experts representing:

- United Nations organizations
- International research institutes
- Academic institutions
- Development policy and practice communities

In addition, a broader audience will participate virtually, accessing the symposium's presentations online.

## **Symposium results**

The symposium will produce several tangible outputs:

- Proceedings: The proceedings of the symposium, summarizing presentations and workshops, will be made publicly available;
- Policy Brief: A briefing paper capturing the main insights guiding the design and implementation of future value chain policies and tools;
- Scientific paper: Depending on symposium results and participant engagement, a scientific publication may be an additional outcome.

## **Program elements and procedures**

The symposium is inspired by three (3) thematic keynotes and structured around six (6) design principles that are debated in the literature and considered important for the value chain approach to contribute to AFS transformation: The actual relevance of and experience with these six principles – (1) system thinking, (2) linking agroecology, landscape, and nutrition with economic perspectives, (3) strong sustainability and planetary boundaries, (4) focus on impact, (5) working with and through change agents, and (6) transformative action and related concepts – will be discussed in moderated interactive workshops among participants. In each of the six (6) workshops, organized in three (3) parallel sessions, a designated participant will give a thought-provoking 10-minute-input.

Each workshop session is introduced by a brief input-note characterizing the design principle in question. Those participants giving input shall provide the necessary overviews and/or provoking “food for thought” on which the following deliberating workshops can build upon. The discussion will be professionally moderated. Additionally, session summary sheets will be protocolled by observers. Fishbowl and other formats will promote interaction. External participants can follow the presentations online. Questions and contributions from external participants will be fed into the workshop in summarized form by a moderator.

Main results and debates of the workshops will be visualized in a dynamically growing pin board exhibition in the aula of the venue and presented before the plenum of participants. The last working session of the symposium consists of a plenum session dedicated to two (2) very practical issues: (1) The (changing) roles of very different value chain actors and (2) the challenge to take a holistic perspective by “merely” applying simple methodologies, actionable tools and decision-making criteria.

The symposium will end with a final visualization of results and a first attempt to characterize the future role of VCD (actors) for AFS transformation. The hope is to inclusively formulate important defining criteria and basic requirements for VCD action that contribute to the goal of AFS transformation.

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## Symposium details at a glance

<i>Location</i>	<i>Senatssaal (1<sup>st</sup> floor)</i> <i>Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin</i> <i>Unter den Linden 6</i> <i>10099 Berlin</i>
<i>Registration</i>	<a href="https://3vneonix.forms.app/registration-berlin-symposium-the-role-of-value-chain-developmentfor-food-systems-transformation">https://3vneonix.forms.app/registration-berlin-symposium-the-role-of-value-chain-developmentfor-food-systems-transformation</a>
<i>Inquiries</i>	<a href="mailto:sle@agrar.hu-berlin.de">sle@agrar.hu-berlin.de</a>
<i>Language</i>	<i>English and German</i>



## Program

**1<sup>st</sup> Day: 08:00 am – 12:00 pm & 01:30 pm – 06:00 pm**

**08:00 am: Coffee & check-in (30')**

**08:30 am Welcome & introduction (30')**

**Celia Schmidt, Markus Hanisch (HU SLE) & Andreas Springer-Heinze (IVLA e.V.)**

Objectives, motivation and guiding threads of the symposium

**Keynote session 1 (45')**

**09:00 am Keynote presentation 1 (30')**

**David Neven (FAO)**

The debate on the role of VCD for AFS transformation

**09:30 am Questions & comments from the plenary (15')**

**09:45 am: Coffee break (30')**

**Parallel sessions 1 & 2 (105')**

<p><b>10:15 am Session 1: System thinking</b></p> <p><b>Room A</b>  <b>Input by Maryam Rezaei (ODI) (10')</b></p> <p>Ways to handle and visualize the system nature of AFS: A value chain development perspective</p>	<p><b>Session 2: Linking agroecology, food security &amp; nutrition with economic perspectives</b></p> <p><b>Room B</b>  <b>Input Benjamin Davies (WHH) (10')</b></p> <p>How to accommodate the different perspectives in sustainable VCD/FST?</p>
<p><b>10:30 am Discussion &amp; exchange of concepts &amp; ideas</b></p>	<p><b>Discussion &amp; exchange of concepts &amp; ideas</b></p>
<p><b>11:45 am Wrapping up results</b></p>	<p><b>Wrapping up results</b></p>

## 12:00 pm – 01:30 pm: Lunch Break (90')

### Keynote session 2 (45')

01:30 pm Keynote presentation 2 (30')

Dietmar Stoian (ICRAF)

20 years of sustainable value chain development (SVCD): What have we learnt (or not)?

02:00 pm Questions & comments from the plenary (15')

### Parallel sessions 3 & 4 (105')

02:15 pm	<b>Session 3: Focus on increasing AFS Resilience</b> Room A Input by Niklas Kitzmann (PIK) (10') The concept of planetary boundaries	<b>Session 4: Staying focused on impact</b> Room B Input by Ruerd Ruben (WUR Wageningen) (10') Staying focused on impact
02:30 pm	Discussion & exchange of concepts & ideas	Discussion & exchange of concepts & ideas
03:45 pm	Wrapping up results	Wrapping up results

### 04:00 pm: Coffee break (30')

04:30 pm **Wrapping up Day 1 (45')**

Plenum: Results pin board exhibition

### 06:00 pm: Evening reception & buffet – venue: Empore Senatssaal



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Day: 09:00 am – 12:30 pm & 01:45 pm – 05:00 pm

### 09:00 am: Welcome to the second day

09:00 am Introduction to Day 2 (30')

Markus Hanisch (HU SLE) & Andreas Springer-Heinze (IVLA e.V.)

### Keynote session 3 (45')

09:30 am Keynote presentation 3 (30')

Neila Dridi, Consultant in value chains and entrepreneurship, Tunisia

Effective transformation practices

10:00 am Questions & comments from the plenary (15')

### 10:15 am: Coffee break (30')

### Parallel sessions 5 & 6 (105')

<p>10:45 am <b>Session 5: Working with and through change agents</b></p> <p>Room A</p> <p>Input by GB Banjara (Agritererra Uganda) (10')</p> <p>Seeking and supporting change agents</p>	<p><b>Session 6: The meaning of transformative action</b></p> <p>Room B</p> <p>Input by Kossi Apedo (GIZ Togo) (10')</p> <p>What makes action transformative?</p>
<p>11:00 am Discussion &amp; exchange of concepts &amp; ideas</p>	<p>Discussion &amp; exchange of concepts &amp; ideas</p>
<p>12:15 pm Wrapping up results</p>	<p>Wrapping up results</p>

## **12:30 pm – 01:30 pm: Lunch Break**

### **Plenary session**

**01:30 pm Transformative value chains - the next generation**

**Input by Jos Bijman (WUR Wageningen) (15')**

On changing roles of actors, methods & requirements

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### **Plenary workshop 1 (60')**

**01:45 pm The (changing) roles of VC actors and activities**

### **02:45 pm: Coffee break (30')**

### **Plenary workshop 2 (75')**

**03:15 pm Guiding principles for future value chain programs designed to drive AFS Transformation**

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### **Closing of the event (30')**

**04:30 pm Formulating outcomes: The future role of VCD in AFS transformation**

Synthesis exhibition – formulating preliminary theses & conclusions

**05:00 pm End of the event**

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## Participants Symposium Berlin, 22. – 23. September 2025

Markus Hanisch	HU Berlin, SLE
Celia Schmidt	Independent Consultant
Andreas Springer-Heinze	IVLA e.V.
Margitta Minah	HU Berlin, SLE
David Neven	FAO/UN
Dietmar Stoian	CIFOR-ICRAF
Neila Dridi	Independent Consultant, Tunisia
Ruerd Ruben	WUR (Wagening University)
Jos Bijmann	WUR (Wagening University)
Fernando Camargo	ECO Consult GmbH & CO Kg
Gupta Bahadur Banjara	AgriTerra, Uganda
Jonas Wittern	GIZ
Gideon Tups	GIZ
Aicha Mechri	HU Berlin, SLE
Beverly Shitandi	GIZ, Kenya
Frederik Oberthuer	GIZ-FMB
Florian Winckler	GIZ MOVE, Ghana
Stefani Reich	Senate Department for Economic Affairs, Energy and Public Enterprises - State Office for Development Cooperation - Berlin
Max Baumann	GIZ
Benjamin Davies	WHH
Tavseef Mairaj Shah	CinSoil / ZALF
Kossi Dodji Apedo	GIZ Togo
Frank Hartwich	UNIDO Wien
Kerstin Lohr	GIZ SASI
Agustina Malvido Perez	HU Berlin
Maryam Rezaei	ODI
Véronique De Herde	Utrecht, Liège
Edwin van der Maden	WUR (Wagening University)
Irmgard Jordan	Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT
Robert Berlin	Senior Advisor, Switzerland
Christopher Korb	WHH
Sandra Pfülb	GIZ
Niklas Kitzmann	PIK
Antoine Gavroye	HEC Liège-Ulège
Guilekun Cyrille Kousse	University of Liege (HEC Liege)
Joseph Alulu	HU Berlin
Guillaume Imbert	GIZ
Helge Merten	HU Berlin, SLE