



Minutes Senior Managers Meeting

Participants

Senior Managers and Board Members

- **Tristan Armstrong**, *Australia (Chair)*
- **Nick Goetschalckx**, *European Commission*
- **Renate Hahlen**, *European Commission*
- **Outi Myatt-Hirvonen**, *Finland*
- **Nicolas Fairise**, *France*
- **Manon Bellon**, *France*
- **Neil Watkins**, *Gates Foundation*
- **Ammad Bahalim**, *Gates Foundation*
- **Jan Brix**, *Germany*
- **Satu Santala**, *IFAD*
- **Ron Hartman**, *IFAD*
- **Federica de Gaetano**, *Italy*
- **Patrick McManus**, *Ireland*
- **Marylaure Crettaz Corredor**, *Switzerland*
- **Bruce Campbell**, *Switzerland*
- **Wilma van Esch**, *The Netherlands*
- **Naomi Sterk**, *The Netherlands*
- **Iris Krebber**, *United Kingdom*
- **Radio Save**, *United Kingdom*
- **Mia Beers**, *United States*

- **Chris Hillbruner**, *United States*
- **Sung Lee**, *United States*

Guests

- **Carin Smaller**, *Shamba Centre*
- **Oshani Perera**, *Shamba Centre*
- **Lysiane Lefebvre**, *Shamba Centre*
- **Kamal Elharty**, *Shamba Centre*
- **Jaron Porciello**, *University of Notre Dame*
- **David Laborde**, *FAO*
- **Marco Milo Lavina**, *EU Delegation Rome*

GDPRD Secretariat

- **Maurizio Navarra**
- **Michelle Tang**
- **Alessandro Cordova**
- **Monique Amar**
- **Sierra Berardelli**
- **Nicole Burch**
- **Jim Woodhill**, *Senior Advisor*
- **Mandakini Surie**, *Senior Consultant*

Agenda

ISSUE	ITEM (DAY ONE)	DETAILS
1.	Welcome and Introduction	Chair/Secretariat
2.	Updates on the Global Donor Platform	Secretariat
3.	Segment I: Options for taking forward Recommendations from the Donor Coordination Workstream	Jim Woodhill
4.	Segment II: Updates on the Sustainable Finance Workstream	Shamba Centre
5.	Segment III: Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) for food systems transformation	Jaron Porciello/Notre Dame
6.	Discussion on donor coordination in preparation of global meetings and other events	Chair/Secretariat
7.	AOB and closing	Chair/Secretariat

Key Highlights/Issues

1. Welcome and Introduction

- The Chair welcomed the Board to the hybrid 2023 Senior Managers Meeting in Rome, Italy.

2. Updates from the Global Donor Platform

PURPOSE OF SECTION:

The Secretariat updated the Board on recent activities and achievements and announced the new Chairmanship cycle for 2024-2025.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Since the transition of the Platform Secretariat to IFAD in 2020, the Platform has been engaging in the food systems agenda through various advocacy initiatives and notably two flagship reports, the 2021 [Stocktaking Report on Donor Contributions to Food Systems](#) and the 2022 [White Paper on Transforming Food Systems: Directions for Enhancing the Catalytic Role of Donors](#), both resulting from consultative processes within the Board. The reports laid the foundations for three workstreams of the Platform in 2022/2023: [country-level donor coordination](#), [innovative financing for food systems](#), and [data for decision making](#).
- Since the June 2022 Annual General Assembly (AGA), the Platform held [four events](#) on sustainable and innovative financing for food systems transformation, a data event on “[Assessing the Quantum Leap in ARD and Food Systems](#)”, a [virtual seminar on donor coordination](#) and high-level event on “[Donor Coordination for Food Systems Transformation: A Forward Agenda](#)” and conducted interviews for the sustainable finance enquiry with the Shama Centre for Food & Climate.
- The [2023 Annual General Assembly](#) will take place on 26-27 October in a hybrid format at IFAD Headquarters in Rome, Italy and online. This year’s AGA coincides with the Donor Platform’s 20th anniversary, a milestone reflected in the theme “20 Years of rural development and aid effectiveness: Where are we now and where are we going?”. During the AGA, donors and others will reflect on the Aid Effectiveness Agenda, with a forward-looking focus on balancing emergency responses and long-term sustainability and resilience measures, donor approaches, and stakeholder engagement. There will be high-level sessions on the country-level donor coordination and sustainable finance workstreams and sessions for the GDPRD’s thematic working groups on land governance and rural youth employment.
- The Platform has developed three new products:
 - An AGA background paper on “[Donor approaches in agricultural and rural development: Shifts and changes in recent decades](#)” which explores the evolution of principles that have affected the work of donors and the Platform over the past two decades in a forward-looking manner, drafted by Brian Baldwin, GDPRD Senior Advisor and former Platform Co-Chair (from his past work at IFAD).
 - The main report of the country-level donor coordination workstream, “[From rhetoric to reality: Donor coordination for food systems transformation](#)”, which provides guidance for actions that can be taken by donors to support food systems transformation, drafted by Jim Woodhill, Senior Advisor, GDPRD, and Mandakini Surie, Senior Consultant, GDPRD.
 - The initial summary report of the findings and recommendations of the enquiry on sustainable finance in agri-food systems, “[Unleashing the catalytic power of donor](#)

[financing to achieve SDG2](#)”, conducted by the Shamba Centre for Food & Climate.

- The Platform enjoyed three years of leadership by Co-Chairs Australia and the European Commission. In 2023, upon expiration of the current co-chairmanship, Board members were requested to volunteer for the next cycle, 2024-2025. Five Board members expressed interest in the next chairmanship cycle. Following weeks of discussion, Bruce Campbell, Senior Policy Advisor at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC/Switzerland) and Iris Krebber, Head of Food Security, Agriculture and Land at the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO/UK) have accepted the Co-Chairmanship position starting from 1 January 2024. This will be submitted to the Board's approval on a no-objections. **[Maurizio Navarra]**

3. Segment I: Options for taking forward Recommendations from the Donor Coordination Workstream

PURPOSE OF SECTION:

Jim Woodhill, Senior Advisor to the Platform, presented a status update on the country-level donor coordination workstream, which included interviews that fed into the high-level seminar and final report with recommendations for the way forward.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- The purpose of this workstream is to guide members and the broader donor and development community on how coordination can be optimized, given past experiences and emerging challenges. This research included key informant interviews and discussions with donors, experts and practitioners working on food systems, country case studies, seminars, and an analysis of best practices on donor alignment, at local, national and global levels.
- A diagram was created to provide an overview of the architecture of the global food systems space, which will be developed into a database, with further details on the varying organizations, groups and networks involved. The final report makes a series of eight recommendations for the donor community to consider, and Board Members were presented the following 3 areas of support for consideration:

1) Supporting enhanced coordination at the national level through learning

from pilot countries: With coordination support from the Secretariat, a group of interested donors could instigate a pilot exercise of improving coordination processes in a limited number of pilot countries. **[Jim Woodhill]**

- In-country efforts are already being led to implement food systems dialogues and the national pathways by various decentralized agencies and UN Resident Coordinators, but more sectorial coordination is needed between decentralized agencies and headquarters and among donors. **[Italy, Switzerland, United Kingdom]**
- There is a need to leverage and give visibility to existing coordination mechanisms led by local or regional institutions, rather than initiating additional coordination exercises, to avoid duplicating or complicating efforts. It would be within the GDPRD's mandate to provide a knowledge exchange platform to develop a set of principles to assist coordination, rather than creating a new mechanism or taking an active role in in-country donor coordination. **[Australia, European Commission, Ireland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States]**

2) Complementarity of different modes of funding: There are increasing modes of donor funding, and the GDPRD could undertake a review of the complementarity of different funding modalities. This review could be linked to the GDPRD’s workstream on sustainable finance through an initial scoping, followed by a detailed review if resources are available. *[Jim Woodhill]*

- It would be beneficial to review the wide range of donor funding and financing mechanisms at the country, regional and global levels to better understand how such financing modalities feed into the national pathways. *[European Commission, Germany]*
- The scope and potential expense of coordinating a review across multiple donors funding mechanisms, including global programs, bilateral projects, and international financial institutions, may surpass what is feasible for the GDPRD. Narrowing the scope of the exercise and conducting a landscape review on one or two specific issues to complement the existing workstream on sustainable financing could be more realistic. *[United States, United Kingdom]*

3) Options for enhanced and regular donor coordination mechanisms at the global level. The GDPRD can support its membership in holding informal coordination meetings ahead of global events/forums (G7, G20, CFS, etc.) or in response to emerging crises, on an ad hoc basis. No collective GDPRD positions would be developed and made public. Rather, individual donors could better align their own positions with other donors, as appropriate. *[Jim Woodhill]*

- The added value of the Platform is in creating a safe space for informal exchanges, and therefore this recommendation is supported. However, senior management time constraints should be considered, and preparatory materials should be given in advance and be short in length to make engagements as conducive as possible, and the meetings without senior management should remain at a technical level. *[European Commission, France, Germany, Switzerland, United States]*
- There is potential value in including others not yet in the GDPRD, such as new and emerging donors, to share perspectives and discuss in informal sessions. The discussions could begin with Board Members and potentially expand to the broader GDPRD membership and external donors, with the goal of organizing meetings and dialogues with zero budget increase. *[European Commission, France, Germany, Maurizio Navarra]*

ACTION POINTS:

- The Secretariat will develop a clear way forward for 2024 and beyond to follow up to this workstream, with terms of references and other material based on the discussion. The proposals will be submitted to the Board for approval.

4. Segment II: Updates on the Sustainable Finance Workstream

PURPOSE OF SECTION:

The Shamba Centre for Food and Climate presented the summary of the enquiry on sustainable and innovative financing for food systems, "[Unleashing the Catalytic Power of Donor Financing to Achieve SDG2](#)", including the workstream activities, methodologies, recommendations and potential next steps.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- The investment gap to achieve SDG2 is estimated at USD 300-500 billion, until 2030. An estimated additional USD\$33-50 billion is needed per year to finance the gap by 2030. The enquiry aimed to address how to finance this gap by exploring how donors and philanthropic funds are making their funding more catalytic, learn about innovation in blended funds and private funds, and understand how the GDFRD can support donors and philanthropic foundations. The investigation consisted of online and in person discussions with over 90 participants, with customized interview protocols, interview transcripts and analysis, and additional research on sustainable finance.
- The enquiry's central message is that **donors and development finance institutions must take higher risks with grants and lending to stretch the donor dollar – every one donor dollar has the potential to mobilize four dollars in commercial finance**. This in turn can catalyze support to agri-food for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) by increasing domestic lenders participation, and markets to deliver affordable borrowing rates at a longer term. The four key findings included:
 1. **Blended finance can make the biggest contribution to SDG 2** by focusing on the 'missing middle': agri-food SMEs seeking finance between USD 25,000 and 1.75 million.
 - SMEs are often too small to receive commercial loans from banks, but too large to receive grants or benefit from microfinance. According to the Council on Smallholder Agricultural Finance (CSAF), the annual financing gap for agri-food SMEs reaches USD 106 billion across sub-Saharan Africa East Asia, and most financing goes to cash crops destined for export, rather than food crops meant for domestic consumption. Despite active efforts from impact funds to finance local market producers in local currencies, including replacing collateral with purchasing contracts, contacting farming agreements and offtake agreements, there are higher risks of default, loan losses and local currency risks when lending to this segment.
 2. **Every dollar of concessional finance can mobilize four dollars of commercial finance**. However, whether those four dollars deliver on sustainable development will determine if blended finance is truly additional.
 - The blended finance market is dominated by development finance institutions (DFIs), and concessional financing should anchor, de-risk and crowd in more private investors. Furthermore, it should increase additionality, by aligning with environmental, economic, and social development goals for sustainable development impact.
 3. **DFIs are governed by rules that discourage them from taking risks** to provide finance that would not be otherwise available from commercial lenders.
 - DFIs must maintain investment-grade credit ratings to continue to operate and mobilize commercial financing, which often discourages them from taking the risks of financing. When they do invest, they tend to provide senior debt, rather than first-loss financing, as these investments offer lower financial returns compared to other sectors.
 4. **More research and data on the performance of agri-food SME loans** that originate from donors is a prerequisite to make ODA catalytic.
 - There is currently no public data repository on agri-food SME loan performance, and the lack of comparable data hinders donors from comparing the results of

their lending programs with those of other donors/DFIs, limiting their ability to make better decisions and address market failures.

- The four main recommendations emerging from the enquiry are the following:
 1. Donors and DFIs should use guarantees and incentives to build the expertise and risk appetite of domestic lenders to finance agri-food SMEs, by scaling up results-based incentives for domestic lenders and supporting the development of an agri-food credit risk assessment scorecard targeted at domestic lenders in developing countries.
 2. Develop a multi-donor working group and knowledge hub to pool resources, reduce transaction costs, increase first loss and results-based financing, and eventually lend at commercial rates, to grow the pool of blended finance.
 3. Provide dedicated pools of funds for DFIs to offer high-risk financing with defined targets for sustainability, through loans, credit lines, guarantees, and technical assistance to domestic lenders, allowing DFIs to go where no private sector investor will go while not affecting their credit rankings.
 4. Develop a data repository on the performance of agri-food SMEs loans from donors, which could in turn be used to support the multi-donor working group.

[Shamba Centre]

Q&A:

- Where does the data come from, particularly regarding one donor dollar having the potential to mobilize four commercial dollars? **[France]**
 - The data comes from Convergence, a global network for blended finance that generates blended finance data, intelligence, and deal flow to increase private sector investment in developing countries. **[Shamba Centre]**
- Does blended finance service those seeking smaller amounts, from USD 50,000 to 2,000,000? It is often the case that DFIs and others require a minimal threshold of USD 10,000,000. **[United Kingdom]**
 - Yes, impact funds and investors are servicing loans from around USD 75,000, which are often targeted loans to small scale cooperatives. One good example of such is the [Land Degradation Neutrality Fund](#). **[Shamba Centre]**
- When projects are referred to as being risky, does this include social elements like gender and youth? **[Italy]**
 - Precisely. Once gender and youth targets are included, the cost of capital becomes more expensive, which is why the donor dollar should be used to catalyze financing that progresses the SDGs. **[Shamba Centre]**
- Examples of common de-risking mechanisms and their impacts would be useful to demonstrate best practices. **[IFAD]**
 - [GuarantCo](#) is a good example active in most low-and-middle-income countries providing local currency credit, [Proparco](#) is an example of international de-risking, and [Green Guarantee Company](#) is an example of de-risking green projects. **[Shamba Centre]**
- What are the next steps for the draft report and the workstream? **[United States]**
 - The report's findings will be presented at the AGA during the [High-Level Session on Sustainable Finance](#) on Friday, 27 October. The draft report is now available on the Platform's website and is open for feedback, and then it will be revised, edited and designed for final publication. **[Shamba Centre]**

ACTION POINTS:

- The Secretariat will develop a proposal to follow-up on the workstreams' next steps, to be presented in the next Board Meeting for approval.

5. Segment III: Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) for food systems transformation

PURPOSE OF SECTION:

Have an initial conversation on the potential for AI for agriculture and food systems transformation.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly developed over recent years and has the potential to advance agri-food systems transformation and drive positive change towards the SDGs. Donors and governments can build upon the large quantity of data that has been collected over the last sixty years; however, significant ethical and co-ordinational challenges must be considered to navigate AI usage in agrifood systems effectively and responsibly.
- While private sector investment in the development of AI is essential, the public sector often struggles to keep up with the cost of large-scale AI technological developments, which results in the centralization of few companies and monopolies. Additionally, there is still limited expertise in areas including data and computational science and statistics, further compounding the existing power imbalances. Data privacy concerns also remain and should be considered for equitable use of data and inclusive tech.
- Donors, governments, and agencies are seeking strategic guidance and advice on the relevant usage of AI, while considering ethical and practical dilemmas. Four key areas of interest around AI usage in agri-food systems include: (1) scenario planning and priority setting; (2) near and real-time decision support (promising examples of this including early warning systems and pest disease systems, which can progress areas with low or limited data); (3) monitoring, learning and evaluation systems; and (4) collapsing the divide between traditional and expert knowledge, (one project example is [Hasov.ai](#)).
- Together with Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the University of Notre Dame is developing a large-language AI model to understand the highest-impact and lowest cost interventions within GAC's project portfolio. This process included four stages: (1) data collection; (2) aggregation and merging; (3) enriching dataset with AI predictions; and (4) data visualization. The dashboard resultant of the data modelling now shows Canada's development projects, searchable by outcome, intervention, country, etc., in visually understandable graphics. The opportunities for next steps are to consider coordination and collaboration for improving models across the food system, as the model developed with GAC improves with each use.
- The GDPRD can build off the existing workstream on data for decision making by promoting learning, engagement and awareness through facilitated conversations and collect high-impact use cases to harness best practices of AI for donors and the international development community. **[Jaron Porciello]**
- The US recently partnered with the Gates Foundation to co-fund a comprehensive study, [Inclusively Advancing Agrifood Systems through AI and Automation](#), which examined the opportunities and barriers to the inclusive uptake of AI in agrifood systems. This proposal can build off and complement the studies' findings and recommendations, and there are opportunities to move these recommendations to action through greater donor and stakeholder coordination. **[United States]**

6. Discussion on donor coordination in preparation of global meetings and other events – In particular, the African Union Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit

PURPOSE OF SECTION

A brief discussion of the convening potential of the Platform, particularly ahead of the [African Union Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit](#).

ISSUES DISCUSSED

- The African Union Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit will bring together a broad number of partners and relevant stakeholders, beyond traditional donors, to highlight the role of fertilizer and soil health in sustainable productivity growth in African agriculture. It would be a strategic opportunity for the GDPRD Board to meet ahead of the Summit and other global meetings to share perspectives and potentially align positions to specific initiatives or programmes, such as the African Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan. **[United States]**

Q&A:

- The Summit has now been postponed more than once, is there an issue with the hosting country, or any other reason for this? **[United Kingdom]**
 - It is understood that although the Summit has been postponed, it will move forward. There are ongoing programmes around fertilizer and soil health in Africa that continue to expand and be implemented, and postponement should not defer the Board from having an open conversation to learn about specific initiatives others are active in and coordinate common views. **[The Netherlands, United States]**

7. AOB and closing

- The next Board meeting will be scheduled before the end of the year, date and time to be announced in due course.