



# UNEP's Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Catalysing Regional Food Loss and Waste Action



Photo: Rice serving in a restaurant. Source: Huy Phan (Pexels)

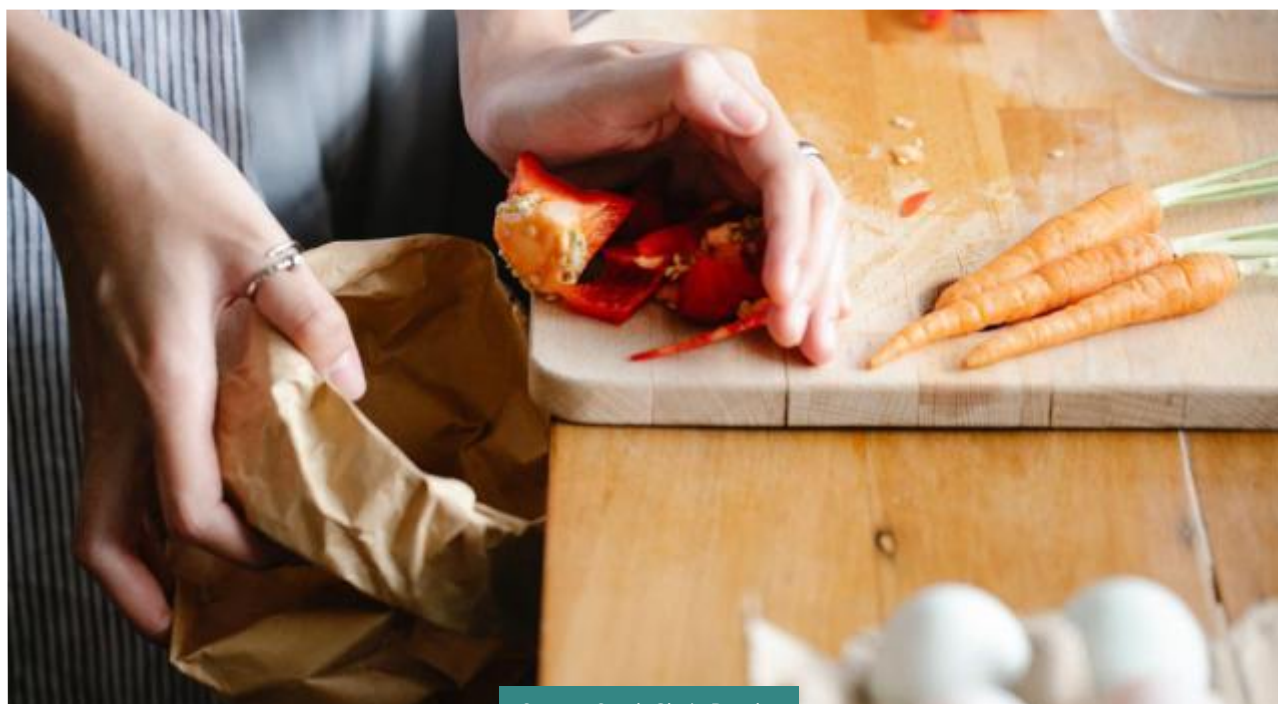
*Since formation in the 1972, United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) has been playing a pivotal role in addressing global environmental issues and is now actively tackling food loss and waste. Its initiatives range from comprehensive reports on food waste statistics to strengthening capacities with regional dialogues and innovative digital technologies. Through multi-stakeholder initiatives and emphasizing data-driven strategies, UNEP is driving international efforts to reduce food waste, climate and enhance food security.*

## Key messages

- As co-leads members of the Food is Never Waste Coalition, UNEP and other leading organisations emphasise the Target, Measure, Act approach to promote standard food waste data methodology
- The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2021 showed that 931 million tonnes of food ended up in the bin in 2019 – the equivalent of 23 million fully loaded 40-tonne trucks,
- UNEP convenes leads the Cool Coalition which aims to promote efficient and climate-friendly technologies to prevent food loss and waste across supply chains while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Public-private partnerships are an effective way to eliminate food loss and waste across value chains collaboratively. UNEP conducted feasibility studies for PPPs in Brazil and Colombia in 2022, and this year a multi-stakeholder initiative, “Pacto contra a fome” (The Pact against hunger) was launched to tackle hunger and food waste in Brazil.
- In Colombia, UNEP supports the use of green and digital technologies including the development of food redistribution and upcycling apps.

## UN agencies leading on food loss and waste

Founded in 1972 after the United Nations Environmental Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP)’s core mission is to find solutions to the triple planetary crisis- climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.<sup>1</sup> As the custodian of the indicator SDG 12.3b, UNEP co-hosts with FAO the International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste on 29 September each year.<sup>2</sup> Mandated by the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolution 4/2, UNEP builds capacity and advocates for improved enabling conditions to halve food loss and waste.



Source: Sarah Chai - Pexels

<sup>1</sup> The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a new relationship between people and the earth ; 2020; [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> FAO; Campaign on International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste; 2023 [Link](#)

## Food waste - A common problem

Using data from 54 countries, The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2021, developed in collaboration with WRAP, is the world's most comprehensive report into global food waste in homes, the food service sector and retail.<sup>3</sup> The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2021 revealed that around 931 million tonnes of food waste were generated in 2019, 61 per cent of which came from households, 26 per cent from food service and 13 per cent from retail.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier narratives of global food waste suggested that consumer food waste occurred mainly in developed countries, while production, storage and transportation losses were concentrated in developing countries. However, this report has found that household food waste per capita is similar across high-income, upper-middle-income and lower-middle-income countries with new data to be published in the new Food Waste Index at COP28.

The Food Waste Index report shows that 931 million tonnes of food ended up in the bin in 2019 – the equivalent of 23 million fully loaded 40-tonne trucks, which, if laid bumper-to-bumper, would circle the earth 7 times. That's 17% of all the food available to consumers that didn't make it to a mouth.



Source: Jonathan Kemper - Unsplash

## Strengthening the capacities of governments for national food waste prevention strategies

In 2021, UNEP's initiative "Global Opportunities for SDGs" (GO4SDGs) together with WRAP and One Planet Network- Programme on Sustainable food Systems launched Regional Working Groups on Food Waste for Asia Pacific, West Asia, Africa, and Latin America & the Caribbean to provide capacity building on the measurement and reduction of food waste.<sup>5</sup> Each regional working group comprises government officials from national and subnational levels, NGOs, universities, think tanks, and national networks working on food waste measurement and prevention strategies.

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<sup>3</sup> UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2021; [\(Link\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Food Waste Index Report 2021; [\(Link\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Regional Working Groups on Food Waste: Measurement and reduction [\(Link\)](#)

## Promoting cold chain to end food loss and waste

UNEP also leads the Cool Coalition – a joint effort of over 100 governments, cities, businesses, development organisations, and civil society groups.<sup>6</sup> The Cool Coalition fosters advocacy, knowledge and action to accelerate the global transition to efficient and climate-friendly cooling to prevent FLW across the food value chain (1). In 2022, UNEP and FAO collaborated in preparing the publication Sustainable Food Cold Chains: opportunities, challenges and the Way Forward, which states food cold chains are critical to meeting the challenge of feeding an additional two billion people by 2050, harnessing the resilience of rural communities, and preventing an increase greenhouse gas emissions.

## Pact against hunger and food waste in Brazil

Food insecurity in Brazil, like in many other countries, has been a significant concern in the post-COVID-19 era. For many Brazilians, lockdowns and restrictions led to job losses, reduced incomes, and economic instability. The pandemic disrupted food supply chains, causing temporary shortages and price fluctuations. Vulnerable populations in Brazil had limited access to food during these disruptions. Against this backdrop, Pacto contra a fome<sup>7</sup> (The Pact Against Hunger), a multisectoral partnership of the government, private sector and civil society working towards combating hunger and reducing food waste in Brazil, was launched in May 2023.<sup>8</sup>

The partnership was developed following an extensive study by Integration consulting that sought to link food waste and causes of hunger in Brazil in 2021. The study showed that, within this reality, there are some groups that are more vulnerable to hunger, which are: families headed by women (19.3% of the total), black and brown populations (18.1% of the total) and urban populations (15% of your total).

Since its inception, the movement has informed and raised awareness about the problems of hunger and food waste thus uniting all Brazilians around the same purpose: ensuring that each person has access to adequate food.

## Using green and digital technologies to reduce food waste in Colombia

In Colombia, about 10 million tons of food estimated to cost about 45 million Colombian pesos are lost and wasted each year, enough to feed the population of Bogota – the country's capital and largest city. Of every 3 tons of food produced in the country, 1 ton ends up in the garbage.<sup>9</sup>

To address this challenge, UNEP, with the support of the University of Los Andes and within the context of the Green Tech Project, launched #SinDesperdicio Bogotá, a programme focused on strengthening the entrepreneurial skills of digital start-ups.<sup>10</sup> Different types of technologies have been developed, ranging from repurposing food waste such as SCP Alimentación Animal Ecológica, Salva, Sticky Snacks and Zeotropic, to apps aimed at

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<sup>6</sup>“Cool Coalition” comes together to save lives, energy and trillions for the global economy; [\(Link\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Pact Against Hunger is launched in São Paulo with support from the Federal Government; Ministry of Development and Social Assistance Family and Fight Against Hunger; [\(Link\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Food and Nutrition Security in Columbia; Challenges And Opportunities For Food And Nutrition Security In The Americas: The View Of The Academies Of Sciences; [\(Link\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> Using Green And Digital Technologies To Reduce Food Waste At The Consumer Level; 2021; [\(Link\)](#)

strengthening engagement between producers and consumers, including Toc-Toc and Siembra Co.

## **Data as the foundation for change**

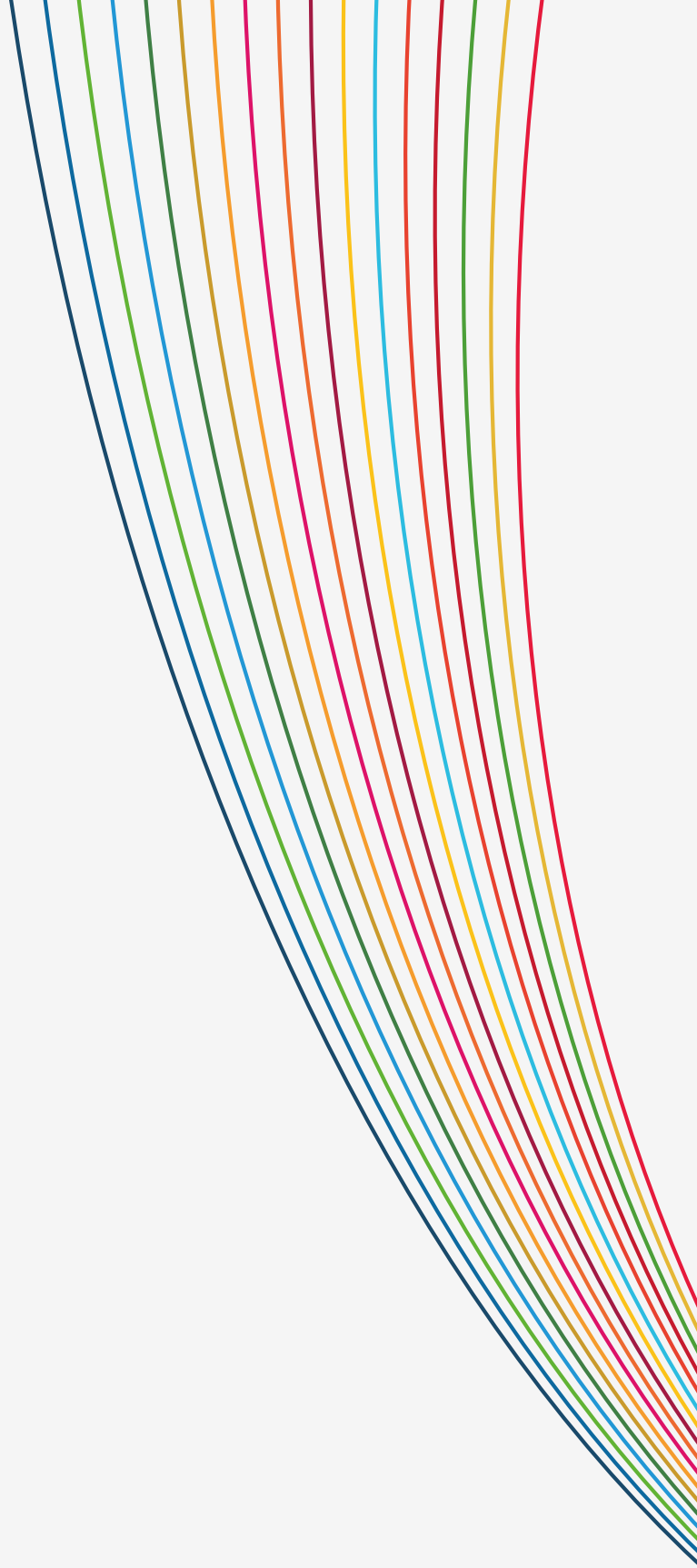
Tackling the food waste funding gap requires a multifaceted approach that involves various stakeholders, including governments, businesses and civil society. Data collection provides the basis to build the case for tackling food waste, to provide an understanding of the nature of food waste in a country, to inform a national food waste strategy based on food waste hotspots and to track food waste over time. Accurate, traceable and comparable measurement is a key starting point for national food waste strategies and policies to deliver the 50% reduction in consumer food waste targeted in SDG 12.3.

Currently, 17 countries have high-quality data compatible with SDG 12.3.1(b) reporting for at least one sector, with a further 42 countries with some measurement estimate which, with some small updates, could create an SDG 12.3 - compatible estimation.

The Food Waste Index Report 2023 - with new global estimates will be published at COP28 in December 2023.

However, sufficiently delivering reductions in food waste can be an essential avenue for stakeholders to save money, improve food security, reduce environmental impacts and add value to circular economy processes.

A few countries are progressing well on SDG 12.3, but most are just getting started. It is an ambitious target, with essential impacts, on hunger, economies, climate, nature, and pollution.



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