

REDUCING WASTE, FROM FARM TO PLATE

A multi-stakeholder recipe to reduce food loss and waste



| Global Scope, Local Action

FAO's Code of Conduct for food loss and waste reduction accelerating Food Systems Transformation



Photo by Kostiantyn Li - Unsplash

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) developed the Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction (CoC), following a request of the 26th Session of FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG). Developed through an inclusive process, with multi-stakeholder consultations held at global and regional levels, the CoC has a global scope and presents actions and measures that countries, national and sub-national authorities, food supply chain actors, private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), academic and research institutions, and others can put in place for reducing food loss and waste. This case study highlights the varied facets of this CoC and its progress through the years, with rising regional and national adaptation endeavours.

Key messages

- The Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction (CoC) is recognised as a crucial global framework for tackling Food Loss and Waste. It provides a guideline for food systems actors across the food value chain for enhancing adaptability to diverse socio-economic, geographic and other contexts.
- Implementing the CoC requires a delicate balancing of the various stakeholder engagements needed at different points for ensuring food security and food system transformation. With a keen focus on addressing the urgency of delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals, the CoC lays emphasis on local contextualisation, enhancing capacity of actors along the way, and supporting country-level and regional adaptation within the context of existing local frameworks.
- The agencies of public and private sector actors share a chief responsibility towards addressing food loss and waste. While the public sector can bridge institutional gaps and provide space for incentivising the reduction of food loss and waste, the private sector can support the much-needed innovations and enhance investments to reduce food loss and waste.

The Delicate Balancing Act

Global food systems are facing an increasing number of interconnected challenges of crises, conflicts and climate change. To be able to feed a global population expected to reach 10 billion by the year 2050, efforts are needed to transition food systems onto a sustainable trajectory to deliver safe, affordable and healthy diets for all. At the same time, growth should be inclusive, ensure economic and social development, and not compromise future generations with negative impacts on natural resources, ecosystems and the environment.

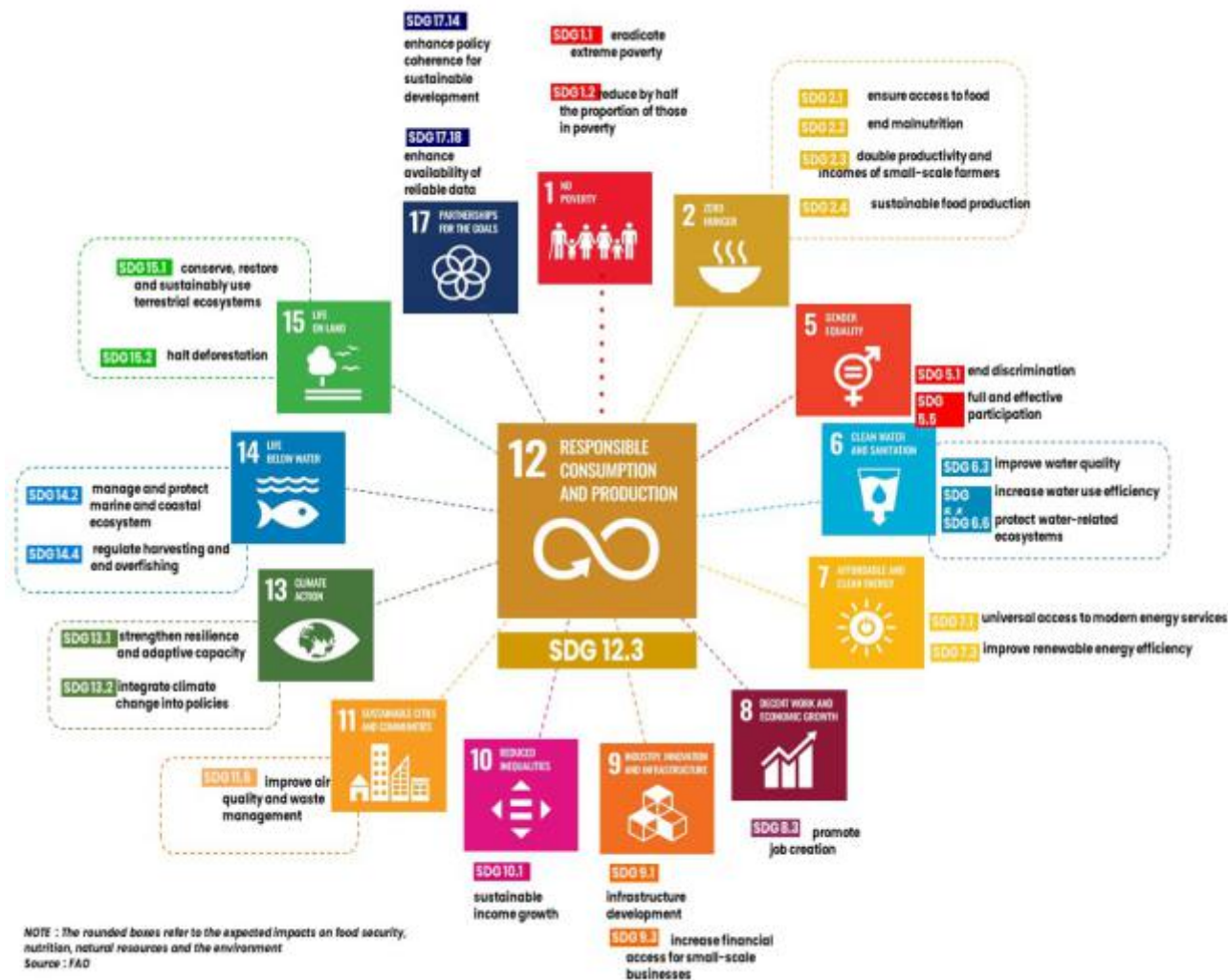
Towards this objective food loss and waste prevention and reduction holds the power to accelerate transformational change and make agrifood systems more resilient, efficient, sustainable and inclusive.

There is wide recognition across the world that food loss and waste (SDG 12.3) is a critical issue linked to most other SDGs i.e. SDG 2 (ending hunger and achieving food security and improved nutrition), SDG 6 (sustainable water management), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate change), SDG 14 (marine resources) and SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems, forests, land and biodiversity). Also SDG 1 (ending poverty), SDG 8 (sustainable economic growth and decent employment) and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities).¹

There is thus an ever-increasing need to raise awareness and build robust regulatory frameworks and policy coherence for contributing to progress on this SDG12.3.

The FAO's Code of Conduct on Food Loss and Waste Reduction provides such a voluntary framework for guiding countries and regions focusing on food loss and waste reduction.

¹ The State of Food and Agriculture, 2019; [\(Link\)](#)



Food Loss and Waste and the SDGs, Adapted from State of Food & Agriculture Report 2019 (FAO)

A key lever for food systems transformation

The relation between food loss and waste, and food security and nutrition is complex. Food security and nutrition does not simply improve if less food gets wasted, and more food made available. An improvement in food availability really depends on where in the food supply chain and in which geographical location food losses or waste are being reduced and where food insecurity exists. Backed by this evidence, the genesis of the international code of conduct for food loss and waste reduction was started in 2018 when it was first recommended by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG). Thereafter the FAO held a series of consultative processes at regional and global levels, to capture views of policymakers, the private sector, producer organisations, civil society organisations, and development sector partners, for condensing it into the form of the Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction. The final approved version of the CoC presented to members in 2021 thus has been written as a 'living document' that calls to action, countries and regions for reducing food loss and waste in typical contexts. With the expanding import of the CoC due to ever-growing pressures at the delicate nexus of agriculture, food and climate; the CoC is being continually adapted by countries and regions to reflect particular socio-economic, geographic and other priorities.

Therefore, one of the initial obstacles in formulating such a document was to make sure its language and principles were all-encompassing on the one hand and avoided specificity (which would make it difficult to adapt to) on the other.

Guiding principles of the CoC for reducing food loss and waste

The guiding principle of the Code is the interconnected nature of sustainability goals and the idea of maintaining balance. This is a global framework with general principles and actions that can be adapted locally, nationally, and regionally. “These are bottom line principles that must be followed to ensure that when we are addressing the issue of food loss and waste reduction – no matter the geographical or other conditions – if we comply with these general principles, it means we are sustainable” says Divine Nije, Deputy Director, Food Systems and Food Safety Division, FAO.

While the Code provides a long list of food systems actors, it underlines the role of the government actors to take the lead in food loss and waste matters within their jurisdictions to develop intervention packages aimed at effectively and sustainably reducing food loss and waste.

For the Code to get into an applicable form, it needs to be adapted to regional contexts. The FAO provides technical support to any country that requests it towards Code adoption. This ranges from building awareness of different stakeholders (policymakers, consumers etc.), building technical capacities at different levels, and helping or working with international finance institutions to get support in terms of investments for infrastructure, intervention, and support partnerships in the value chain. There are cases in point that serve as new benchmarks of countries taking action to stem food loss and waste, having sought FAO's support for implementation of their food loss and waste ambitions, in line with implementation of national pathways that emerged beyond the UNFSS Summit of 2021 and its subsequent stock-take.

More than eighty countries identified food loss and waste as an issue in their national pathways and the FAO is supporting them to contextualise the Code and other related instruments for tackling food loss and waste reduction.

Taking measured steps

Creating a dynamic and inclusive CoC has involved a tedious investment of intentions by a multitude of partners through iterative consultation processes.

At the implementation front therefore, implementing agencies of government and other agencies in the country context, must ensure capacity strengthening of actors and fusing the CoC within the existing country or regional frameworks, for reach desired outcomes.

The level of intricacy and challenge rises, when FLW reduction structures are already in place, say in a country / regional context, as this requires adjusting existing structures to redesign new ones. Many countries in the African region, for instance, already have national agricultural investment plans in place that must align well with their ambition to adapt the CoC.

There are emerging, model standards in-the-making however, inspiring action and ideation around the world, with examples of regional and country relevance already established with localised adaptations of the Code already done. As first movers and of the largest proponents, Latin America has drawn the Model Law for Prevention of Food Loss and Waste²

² Model Law for Prevention of Food Loss and Waste (Available in Spanish); Adopted by Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO) ([Link](#))

drawing on the recommendations of the FAO's Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction. Given that parliamentarians can act as proactive political agents when it comes to improving food systems and eating habits in order to deal with the FLW; during 2020, multiple instances of dialogue and training were held with parliamentarians of the PARLATINO committees, in these exchange sessions, FAO technical teams shared experiences in the reduction and prevention of FLW in the Region, as well as the guiding principles of the CoC-FLW. Following these exchange sessions, a model law draft began to be developed, which was reviewed by various PARLATINO committees, resulting in the final document that defines the Model Law for the prevention and reduction of food loss and waste.³

There are also other regional and country versions. “Countries are also developing legislation around the Code, such as Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, and have requested the FAO's technical support to implement their respective national versions” says Njie. The FAO has also published a legal brief for parliamentarians of the Latin America and Caribbean region, which also draws on the CoC.

The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region is yet another case in point with its recently released adapted document inspired by the FAO's Voluntary Code of Conduct, for its basis of developing national strategies, policies, and legislation enabling food loss and waste reduction in keeping with national agrifood system objectives of the NENA countries. The actions and principles put forward herein have the ultimate goal of accelerating the region's transition to building back better with sustainable and more resilient agrifood systems.

Meanwhile, countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe – Azerbaijan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, to name a few – have been receiving support from FAO to strengthen their food loss and waste policies and regulatory frameworks in alignment with the guidelines defined within the CoC. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are discussions about an adapted version of this global Code. “So there are already initial movers in terms of national-level implementations. For instance once regional versions are finalised in Africa, we hope to see a stream of inspired national implementations happening at the country's-level,” says Divine.

The relevance of regional versions of the CoC speaks to the diverse needs and respective national and regional priorities while defining the nuances of adapted versions. For instance, low and middle-income countries are seen to record more post-harvest loss while in high-income countries, there is a higher tendency for food waste, the differentiation factor being, the latter will have strong institutional support and infrastructure that is more adept at stemming food loss as opposed to food waste.

The European Commission in its agenda, for instance, emphasises addressing inefficiencies in the 'downstream' parts of supply chains,⁴ by reshaping food environments and working with food services and the hospitality industry. “In the Near East region, natural resources like water are scarce, so food loss and waste interventions here must speak to the sustainable use of these natural resources. This need not necessarily be the case in other regions that have different priorities. The CoC contains language and guidance that speaks to adaptation to multiple contexts,” says Njie.

³ Food loss and waste in Chile: Advances and Challenge (Available in Spanish); 2019 ([Link](#))

⁴ EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste ([Link](#))



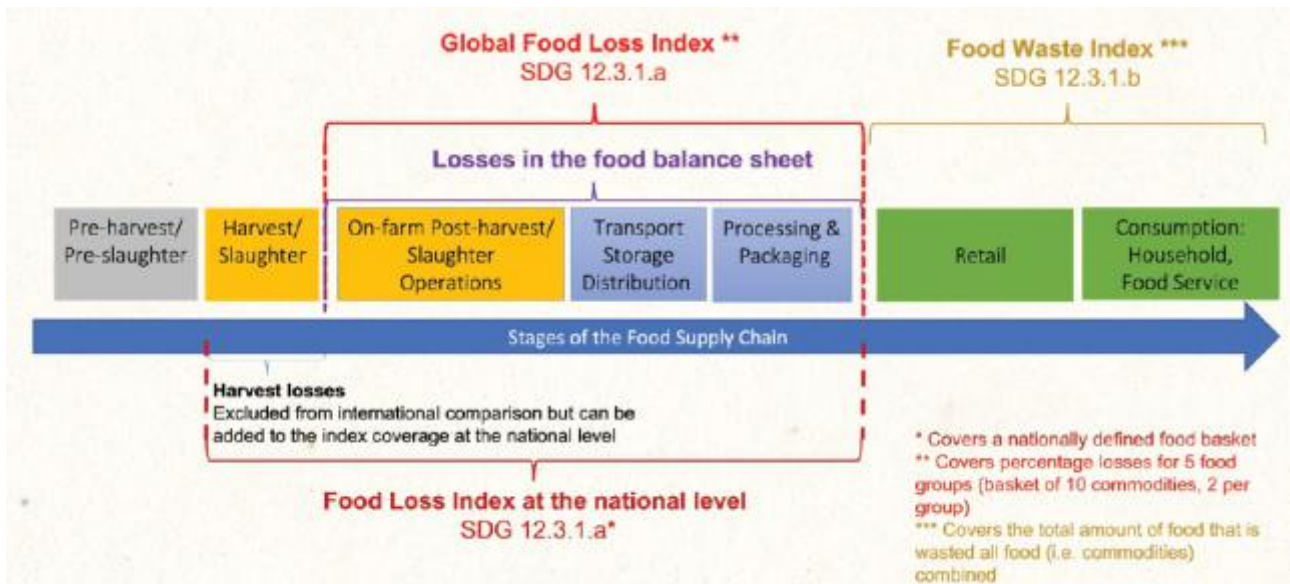
FAO Campaign banner released for the fourth International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (IDAFLW) observed each year on 29 September 2023 ([Link](#))

The way forward for Food Loss and Waste Reduction: A Shared Responsibility

There is recognition of the urgency to accelerate action for achieving the 2030 agenda. There is also recognition that interventions of food loss and waste speak to all 17 SDGs. It allows us simultaneously to address poverty, alongside the inclusion of women, marginalised groups, indigenous people, and youth, and also address environmental issues. This is an advantage and a motivating factor for food loss and waste reduction interventions.

Meanwhile, “lack of evidence on the state of food loss and waste in the countries, the causes and critical points that generate them, is one of the most common barriers that countries face when adopting the Code, according to Sara Granados, FAO, Latin America.

The agenda of the 2030 SDG 12 is to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, and it includes Target 12.3, “by 2030, to halve the per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level, and reduce food losses along production and supply chains including post-harvest losses”. This target is split into a Food Loss and a Food Waste component with different indicators and mandates. FAO has developed a method to measure and monitor the progress on indicator SDG 12.3.1a with the Food Loss Index (losses that occur from harvest) that measures changes in losses over time helping to monitor trends in food losses and direct interventions for maximising impact. Indicator SDG 12.3.1b



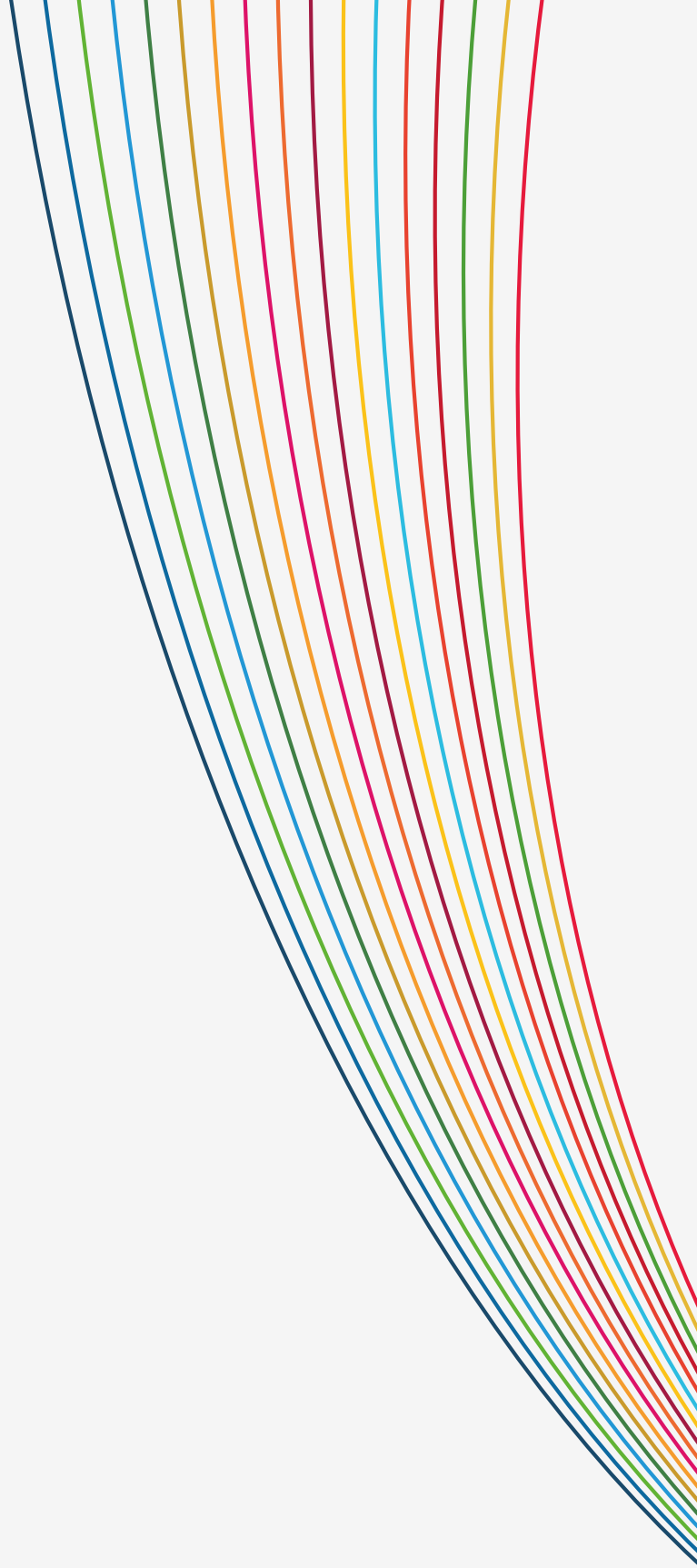
Zone of applicability of the Food Loss Index and the Food Waste Index; Adapted from FAO 2019a, Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction ([Link](#))

Food Waste Index covers waste happening at the retail and consumption levels and is under the mandate of the UNEP.⁵

It is with this intention of translating the stark evidence to action for accelerated food systems transformation, that the fundamental responsibility for implementing the Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction rests with the public sector. However more importantly this must be a joint effort between the public and private sector primarily supported by all other key actors across the food value chain. With the public sector taking the lead in addressing any institutional gaps, building more conducive policy environments, the private sector can be adequately incentivised and encouraged to make the right investments, and implement innovations for stemming food loss and waste.

The CoC as a publication is available electronically on the FAO's website and knowledge platforms, and can be downloaded for use by different target audiences. To promote wider awareness and adaptation of the CoC, the FAO is providing technical expertise and support to countries to expand the evidence base for improved policy making on food loss and waste reduction, in the Latin America and Caribbean, Near East and North Africa, and Asia-Pacific regions. The FAO is also using the CoC as a basis for supporting legislative activities in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.

⁵ SDG 12 sub indicators for Food Loss Index and Food Waste Index, FAO, 2019a ([Link](#))



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