

Dialogue A

The discussion started with the relation between the public and private sector. In the food system it is important to determine who is responsible for what. There was agreement on the fact that the market space has to be defined by clear public borders. What is the public responsibility that limits private acting?

Relation public and private sector

The example being set was Cargill, that trained two million farmers in China. “Are we the best deliverer of this service?”, the Cargill spokesperson wondered. An important question within this respect is: what is the public responsibility that borders private acting? For instance, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs to go beyond the borders of Europe, as the EU is part of the global system.

Food sovereignty

“The food crisis affects one in fifty people in the world.”

Poverty is not only the cause, but can also be the effect of lack of sustainability. “Eighty percent of unsustainability is due to poverty, twenty percent to lack of resources.” Africa within this respect is of main importance. Due to poverty people are focused on the short term. Often this results in unsustainable behaviour, like the overuse of pesticides, nutrients and water.

Food sovereignty is an important issue as there is a need for policy making on public stocks of food. An important question therefore is: how to realize a minimum level of stocks that could stabilise the world market? There is, for instance, an urgent need to monitor the grain flows all over the world.

Urbanisation and globalisation

The combination of urbanisation and globalisation is an important driver to shape future developments in food. Urbanisation creates the need for food that has to be transported and stored. Globalisation is important due to the increasing amount of food miles and its incremental effect on natural resources. On the other hand it was suggested that most of our food is still regionally produced and consumed. Brazil's dairy production, for instance, is self-sufficient and also 95 percent of China's dairy is produced in the country itself. Future developments in meat consumption are also of main importance. If the Chinese would consume equal amounts of meat or more than the US citizens, this would lead to a huge challenge on energy, water and environmental issues. Various experts in the group agreed that top-down policies are not the most favourable solution. The way forward enfolds better technologies in order to make better use of our resources and to internalise costs for environmental and social issues.

Quantity and quality

Technology is important to increase yields. Besides the quantity of food it is also very relevant to take quality of food (nutrients) into account. According to various experts it is crucial to invest in health and vitality of food for the wellbeing of the world. The consumer's position on this matter is very important: "It is all about raising consumer awareness on health and sustainability issues." Entrepreneurial spirit is seen as another crucial driver. We shouldn't think too much in terms of 'systems', it is all about people and entrepreneurship. Additionally it is also important to notice that there is no 'one recipe for the world', since many drivers are very region specific.

Technology: a human-centred approach

"The food industry must learn to talk with human beings instead of communicating to consumers."

Two directions in leadership were distinguished: putting technology in the centre, while noticing that we do not know where we are heading to, or choosing a more human-centred approach. Technology can make a change, however it is a driver that is connected to many others. In order to understand how to move forward it is of main importance to understand the bigger picture.

People eat food and therefore they have to be involved in the process. People more than ever want to know what they eat. Multinationals like Nike and Nokia involve users in the process of designing products. The food industry might also benefit from a more human-centred approach, that starts with needs instead of commodities: "we should talk about food, not about products."

One of the experts mentioned the Brent Spar case of Greenpeace versus Shell, as an example of a non-rational debate. It was indicated that emotion is a very important challenge we have to take care of in our approach: "we have to deal with perception." Populism in this context can be a pitfall. It is therefore crucial to communicate facts to the public. Consumer trust is essential. Thinking in black and white should be left behind: "we have to learn that it is not artificial against natural. We have to combine the various modes of thinking." Stakeholder dialogue is therefore a very useful tool to exchange ideas.