



Sustainable agriculture: where are we on SDGs Implementation?

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On 27th February 2019, CTA organised the 54th Brussels Development Briefing – part of a series of bi-monthly Development Briefings on ACP-EU rural and agricultural issues. Around 240 participants gathered in Brussels to discuss the progress on implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically in relation to sustainable agriculture and SDG2.

Sustainable agriculture: where are we on SDGs implementation? This Briefing looked at the framework for the SDGs, notably in relation to defining and measuring the targets, and the specific instruments, partnerships and investments which have been successful in advancing the implementation of the SDGs notably SDG2. Although the debate indicated some setbacks on progress towards SDG2, it also highlighted important synergies which can be used to leverage greater impact, including through coordinated data collection and management, increased partnerships, particularly with the private sector, and adoption of the whole food systems approach, including a stronger consideration of the tradeoffs which need to be made.

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Isolina Boto



Viwanou Gnassounou

Isolina Boto, Manager of the CTA Brussels Office and the Coordinator of the Brussels Briefings introduced the Briefings, the partners behind their organisation, and welcomed the panellists and audience. As well as being an interesting topic, she highlighted that due to its broad nature, this topic presented some challenges and gave an overview of the evolution of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, as well as the objectives and targets of the SDGs. Although there is strong international commitment to the SDGs, including from the ACP, it requires many factors including good policy, data, statistics, private sector, finance and so forth. The scope of agriculture is across most of the SDGs, although the discussions will focus on SDG2.

Viwanou Gnassounou, Assistant-Secretary-General of the ACP Secretariat, welcomed ACP Embassy representatives at the Briefing, and spoke of SDG 2, which has been the cause of concern since the recent FAO report showing an increase in the absolute number of people

facing hunger, including an increase in middle income countries. This is worrying if we are to avoid countries from falling back into the poverty trap. The ACP is contributing to the SDGs with partners in various ways, such an increase of private sector support, including projects for direct financial support to smallholder farmers and producer organisations. In the last few years, a coherent investment framework has been developed which should enable the ACP to provide more support and advice to smallholders. Initiatives such as the AECF, are playing a positive role in addressing the financing gap, and they need to multiply. Finally, more work is needed to address insurance coverage, with mechanisms which can help manage the risk for those willing to invest, as well as increased research also needed to develop the most appropriate solutions. SDG 17 calls for partnerships, so governments and the private sector should address this in cohort, if we hope to achieve the objectives we set for ourselves.



Michel De Knoop



Michael Hailu



Asfandiyar Khan

Michel De Knoop, from EuropeAid in the European Commission, who welcomed this meeting by noting that it coincides with the EU's presentation of a joint synthesis report on SDG and consensus at the high-level political forum in July. It reviews progress on SDG implementation and partnerships. On 17 October 2018, the EU and Member States published its 3rd implementation report on food security commitments, which showed EU and MS strong comments to SDG2. There have been significant increases in spending and growth in the number of projects supported, and up to 3.8 million smallholders have received rural advisory services. The 3rd Progress Report Commission Action Plan on Nutrition published in 2018 showed that its commitments on allocations and stunting are on track. Sustainable agriculture policies and fisheries and aquaculture are indispensable to achieve SDG2 and eradicate poverty. Monitoring progress requires objective measuring systems with sound indicators. Data is necessary for policymakers to address these challenges. Many countries need to further improve their data collection systems and target indicator methodology, which the EU will support through the "50-50 by 2030" initiative. Private sector cooperation also needs to be improved and the report of the Task Force for Rural Africa supports this approach. Food and nutrition security have to remain at the forefront of development cooperation to reach the SDGs.

Michael Hailu, Director of CTA emphasised the role of agriculture in the economies of ACP countries and its importance if they are to achieve sustainable development. SDG2 is critical in order to achieve the other SDGs, and its eight targets cover many issues beyond food and nutrition security, specifically on sustainable agricultural productivity. Although these targets are often overlooked, they're very critical to achieving SDG2. Unfortunately, most of the SDG2 targets are not being met, and the total number of hungry people has in fact gone up, with climate change and conflicts playing a contributing role. Obesity and stunting have also made slow progress, and climate change is also exacerbating the achievement of SDG2. In Africa, the Malabo Declaration is particularly aligned with SDG2 and in 2018 the Africa Agricultural Transformation Scorecard was launched, which makes an important contribution to track progress in this field. It focuses on seven targets agreed by African heads of state focused around the regional commitments such as the CAADP framework. As part of this accountability process, the first Biennial Review of the Malabo Declaration took place in 2018, which measured the progress of countries in meeting their targets, with the results showing mixed progress among the regions and across the targets. All of CTA's activities also contribute directly to SDG2, which has been illustrated in the CTA's latest strategic framework and in relation to data, CTA through its initiatives supports

also the collection of data from farmers and other groups. These activities include the partnership with GODAN and the African Union through the African Food Safety Index to provide data around food safety.

The first panel, chaired by Viwanou Gnassounou, considered the existing frameworks, partnerships and progress on SDG2, including from policy, research and private sector.

Asfandiyar Khan from FAO's Statistical Unit provided a detailed overview on the progress related to the monitoring of SDG2 and especially on indicator 2.4.1 relating to the proportion of area under productive and sustainable agriculture. The UN has a Global Indicator Framework (GIF) includes 232 indicators which track progress of 169 target across 17 goals. It was endorsed in July 2017 and the UN Statistical Council is responsible for monitoring the GIF with custodian UN agencies assigned for each indicator to develop methodology, build statistical capacity of countries and report and disseminate data, to carry out voluntary national reviews, and advocacy. The Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDG) which will oversee this work, ensure that the process is fully led by countries. The indicators are classified into three tiers or levels, based on a scale measuring methodological development and availability of data. Out of 21 indicators (across 6 SDGs) for which FAO is responsible, in 2015 there



Patrick Caron



Muchiri Nyaggah



were only 3 in tier one (top level), 5 in tier two (intermediary level) and 13 in tier three (bottom level). By 2017 that number had grown to 12 in tier one, 8 in tier two and only 1 in tier 3. Moving on to SDG2, its eight targets and 14 indicators of which FAO is custodian to nine - of these five are tier one, and four are tier two. Several initiatives have been launched by FAO to support countries on statistical capacity, such as free online e-learning courses in several languages, organising of global, regional and national training workshops as well as the SDG data and communication portal, which under the new FAO vision for 2019-2030, will be scaled up to maximise country reporting for the indicators for which FAO is custodian. To date, around 8,000 experts around the world have already downloaded the FAO's e-learning courses on SDG indicators, and more courses are in the pipeline. The training workshops facilitate South-South Cooperation and build the pool of SDG monitoring experts, as well as piloting of new methods, with the goal of improving country reporting on SDG indicators. Indicator 2.4.1 on "Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture" was used to illustrate the development of the methodology for the indicators, such as the three sub-dimensions of the indicator – economic, environmental, and social. For sustainability, there is a "traffic light" assessment scale with green being desirable, yellow being acceptable and red being unsustainable. Next steps for 2.4.1 were shared, and it is

hoped that by 2020 the indicator will be rolled out at country level.

Patrick Caron, Chair of the UN High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLE-FSN), gave a rousing presentation looking at the complexity of achieving food security and nutrition, under SDG2, together with Agenda 2030. Upon close inspection, SDG 2 encompasses hunger, food security, and nutrition, as well as sustainable agriculture – which require policy choices to be made, as there are also strong links between this issues and poverty (SDG1), as well as health (SDG3). The five targets under SDG2 are interesting because they capture the complexity of Agenda 2030, with contradictions and trade-offs that have to be made. For example, the omission of obesity under SDG2, despite the close link between obesity and the issues which SDG2 tries to address. Furthermore, target three links productivity and income are linked, although this gives rise to some inconsistencies and disagreements. Target four also raises the same challenges. Therefore SDG2 should be looked at together with all the other SDGs and questions asked how to leverage SDG2 to achieve them, particularly where there are synergies, but also acknowledging the contradictions. The 20th century saw huge population growth, so then food security and productivity were closely linked, but the paradigm in the 21st century is more complex and the whole food system has to be looked at, including human health, ecosystems health and social and

economic development – to produce and consume better in order to live healthily. On closer examination, there are a number of paradoxes as mankind has never produced so much, eaten as well, yet never found it as hard to eat as today, and moreover, whilst recognising that we have reached a crisis point, there are significant barriers to change and high levels of inaction. However, the latter is not entirely the case – a lot of change is happening but not all of it in the right direction. This is not due to a lack of political will, but these barriers are due to complex issues including lack of data, conflict of interests and so forth. The HLPE was created to improve understanding in these issues, addressing contradictory and often conflicting perspectives. It has released 14 publications, a review of which highlighted four findings: (1) the tight and complex interactions within food systems; (2) the need for a new vision on FSN related challenges; (3) the need for radical transformation of the approach and systems towards food; and (4) to recognise the diverse situations, solutions and global challenges.

Linking the debate to action at local level was **Muchiri Nyaggah** of the Local Development Research Institute in Kenya, who discussed the availability, access and use data for SDGs implementation. Currently, the challenge faced in Africa is the point where good policy makes the leap towards good practice. The LDRI supports Africa's states to reach the objectives surrounding SDG2 using three dimensions – human



Stefano Prato



capital, enabling environment and strengthening financing for decision support. This enabling environment requires strong coordination, a policy and regulatory framework, knowledge management within government and sound infrastructure. Both Agenda 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063 call on the creation of a developmental state whose institutions have a high capacity to access, use and share the available evidence. Moving on to the African context, he highlighted that the Malabo Declaration has seven commitments with 43 indicators, covering 152 data points, many of which are also needed to measure progress on the SDGs. The source of this data will come from many government ministries or institutions, so the challenge becomes how to ensure a consistent understanding of each data point by everyone. Coordination can be especially problematic where data is collected in federal countries by semiautonomous entities at subnational level. The Malabo Declaration tried to improve the pace at which African countries were making progress on food security, nutrition and agriculture, showing immense political will. It adopts a multisectoral approach, which also reflects comments earlier made on intersectoral nature of the SDGs – looking at finance, trade, health, resilience etc. This means data will come not only from government, but also non-government entities. Around 32 signatories of the Declaration have made good progress in providing national data on the indicators, and Kenya for example,

had 88% of the data on the indicators for the Declaration. Nine indicators however, had zero data, and the process of collecting, reporting, reviewing and validating the data can be tedious. LDRI carried out a Malabo Open Data Study, piloted in four countries, to see whether this data was accessible, but found that only fraction of the data is open to the public. The lack of openness of this data means that with each review of the Malabo Declaration, civil servants have to start again from scratch to find the data, which has negatively impacts on morale. From this, arise three recommendations: (1) a framework for coordination is needed in order to deliver on SDG2; (2) investment in institutional strengthening needs to take place; and (3) delivery of data and evidence for decision making should take priority over data for reporting, through greater openness.

Finally, **Stefano Prato** from the Society for International Development (SID) gave the perspective from civil society. First, the world community is off track with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly in SDG2 – but this cannot be resolved by doing more of the same. A significant adjustment of strategies and policies is needed, especially given the context of inequality which currently prevails. Second, there is a grand narrative to scale up production, increase productivity, and this is misleading and possibly even dishonest. The root causes of hunger and malnutrition are related complex social, economic and political factors,

not lack of food. Food waste is high, and the profile of malnutrition is shifting due to the increase in obesity and overweight and diet related NCDs. Third, food systems should be considered with a multidimensional approach, as food systems support many public interests and objectives, and cut across the entire sustainable development agenda. Food systems are the cornerstones of addressing the question of inequality, particularly in terms of shifting the focus towards local food production and food sovereignty. Fourth, there are two opposing worldviews on modernity, food and nutrition, which are in conflict, and this has to be recognised when looking at the SDGs and food systems. On the one side is the corporate model which looks at food as a commodity, and on the other is a spectrum of local community models, often also subsistence, which view food as a fundamental human right. Fifth, this tension between different models begs the question of where is the current agency, given that over half the world is fed by small and medium scale farmers, who in many cases remain among the most vulnerable to food insecurity, and yet are feeding others who themselves are also vulnerable, whilst using only 25% of available resources. Commercial production whilst cheaper, uses more resources, and creates many externalities. There is no medium between these two extremes in our food systems. Sixth, the 2030 Agenda talks about the need to scale up resources but this is misleading – the 2030 Agenda is fundamentally a policy challenge rather than a

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Modibo Traoré



financial one, and it has to recognise the challenging cohabitation between these two approaches. A fundamental policy shift must take place to unambiguously support small scale producers, local food systems, and the regeneration of our ecosystems. Seventh, in the 2030 Agenda the issue of governance needs addressing, and food governance needs to solve systemic issues in sustainable development, which requires policy coordination, and the strengthening of intergovernmental processes like the CFS.

The **Questions and Answers** of the first panel raised a strong remarks and challenging interventions from the audience. **Viwanou Gnassounou** addressed the issue of public-private partnerships, noting that although not the topic of specific presentations, partnerships have been highlighted as important in the context of the topics presented. Additionally, on whether food security can be met whilst protecting species, he noted that protected species are in themselves also cultural resources, and species protection often involves partnerships with local communities to ensure that they'll still have substitute access to protein. **Patrick Caron** addressed the question of the institutional framework to enable the post-2030 agenda by emphasising the last point on governance raised by Stefano Prato, namely that the institutional framework needs to look at food security as a common good, if Agenda 2030 is to be achieved. This is so at the international level, but also at the national and

local level. In terms of progress, he recommends focusing on the voluntary guidelines on food systems of the CFS are a good mechanism to provide and international reference framework that stakeholders can use to advance progress nationally and so forth. Furthermore, the HLP report also singles out food environments as central to enabling change as this considers all social, economic and political aspects of food. **Asfandiyar Khan** underlined that SDG17 partnerships were indeed at the heart of FAO's work on the SDGs, including all development partners and stakeholders from cooperatives, private sector, south-south cooperation and parliamentary alliances, especially on building consensus around methodology and now on reporting on the indicators. **Muchiri Nyaggah** noted on PPPs that the Malabo Declaration also has benchmark on this which, with a performance category with four indicators which look at establishing PPPs along priority agricultural commodity value chains, but ensuring that the PPPs are sustainable, replicable and not exploitative remains a challenge.

The second panel was chaired by Michel De Knoop and examined best practices towards successful SDG implementation.

Modibo Traoré, the Director of Multilateral Cooperation at Mali's Ministry of Foreign Affairs began this second with an overview of Mali's approach to the SDGs. He started the presentation with a general

introduction to Mali, particularly the security and political challenges which hamper its progress. In Mali's case, SDG2 goes hand in hand with SDG17, as partnerships are essential to implementation of this goal, given Mali's high economic reliance on agriculture, particularly family farming, smallholdings and other traditional production means – meaning that modern techniques are generally limited. Widespread hunger and malnutrition are also a problem. After the launch of the SDGs in Mali, two reviews were carried out – one on Zero Hunger with the WFP, and a study of the cost of hunger in Mali, also with WFP and other. There are many programmes to address these issues in Mali, as well as strong political commitment – over twelve policies in this area – and a significant share of the budget al. Nevertheless, Mali is constrained by challenges related to limited capacity and financial resources – exacerbated by the sheer number of policies which lead to fragmentation. SDG17 is important in Mali, but the country relies more on development aid today than it did in the past. Mali's approach to implementing the SDGs considers each SDG target as a microprogramme, because all SDGs are linked, rather than having a single sectoral approach to address each one. Different partners are grouped under a theme to build partnerships and find synergies, in order to avoid further fragmentation. The themes cover numerous SDGs, with SDG 2 under sustainable economic growth, along with other SDGs which aim to eradicate poverty. For SDG 17, there

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Daniel Ohonde



Gurbir S. Bhullar



is also a consideration of the role of remittances, for which a recent law was passed, as well as PPPs and new policies to address development aid and. Challenges remain in terms of lack of qualified personnel and human capacity and lack of financial resources. Next steps are to implement the institutional framework for implementing the SDGs and to include the SDGs in Mali's general economic plans and development programmes. Capacity building is also needed and work must be done on indicators for priority SDGs as well as data and the means to analyse it.

The following presentation by **Daniel Ohonde**, AECF's CEO, who shared AECF's experience working with the private sector to make a difference in the rural sector. AECF is active in agribusiness/ agriculture, as well as renewable energy and climate adaptation and mitigation. It also works on cross-cutting themes: gender, youth and fragile contexts. AECF has been operating for ten years and has worked with 268 companies so far in 26 countries. AECF is mainly funded by public sources, and its entrepreneurs also leverage additional funds – to date, up to US\$ 740million has been raised this way. AECF's work cuts across many SDGs, critically, SDG1, SD2, SDG5, SDG7, SDG8 and SDG13. These entrepreneurs are not versed in the SDGs, but they do understand that their work contributes to nutrition and food security in areas where they are operating. Financing for agribusiness remains a big challenge – it is considered risky and perceived

as difficult, and an important part of AECF's work is to bridge the gap between the low level seed capital provided by NGO's and the large scale venture capital investments which exceed a million dollars. This missing middle covers investments of around US\$100,000, which have high transaction costs, and so are generally considered to be unprofitable. The impact investment landscape in Africa is characterised by significant interest at the high level of investment, and with opportunities to grow even bigger. Using a challenge fund model, AECF has supported 159 businesses across the continent which then support small scale farmers. After it supports early stage companies, those that are ready are supported to graduate to get access to commercial funding and start trading with larger local businesses. AECF estimates that it has impacted 18 million lives, 40% of whom are women, and created 11 000 jobs directly, of which 60% have been for youth. Specific contributions to the SDGs have been in terms of nutrition, through support to businesses active in this area, as well as employment through businesses who support local livelihoods. In conclusion, there important recommendations were made: (1) the need to support finance towards the private sector for sustainable agriculture; (2) the need to shift away from a mind-set that agriculture is risky; (3) the need to create partnerships, especially to exchange lessons on success.

Gurbir S. Bhullar, Group lead Tropical Agriculture at FiBL,

presented the results and impact based on studies of organic and agro-ecological approaches to agriculture in developing countries. A study on coffee production in Uganda found that agricultural activities contribute to all the SDGs and also demonstrated their interconnectedness. We know the challenges in developing parts of the world – soil degradation, climate change, small-scale structures, and these are influencing the smallholder farmers which supply most of the food. However, most of the data points on organic and agroecological approaches comes from North America and Europe, and there is limited field research on different types of agricultural activities in the global south. FiBL has run a couple of projects to fill this gap, whose results were presented – the Long Term Farming Systems Comparisons Trials in the Tropics (SySCOM), and the Productivity, Profitability and Sustainability of Organic and Conventional farming Systems: comparative analyses in Sub-Saharan Africa (ProEcoAfrica/OFSA). SySCOM was run in Bolivia, Kenya and India on key cash crops. ProEcoAfrica is in Kenya. The SySCOM aims to compare the conventional system of farming with agro-ecoecological or organic forms of production. Results from the trials were presented by country. In Kenya, results showed that the holistic management of the system has the greatest impact on soil fertility, rather than specifically *which* system is used. India and Bolivia showed the same higher soil carbon content in the non-conventional forms



Carin Smaller



of farming. In terms of biodiversity conservation, this is higher in organic and agro-ecological farming. Crop yields were also measured, showing that yields for grew larger in conventional production than in organic agriculture, and pest control. In India, soybean yields are equal between conventional and organic production as they are legumes, but for cotton there are years of comparable yields interspersed with years of lower yields, which is greatly influenced by the incidence of pests, and wheat has the biggest difference between yields in organic versus conventional production . Looking at the average gross margins, soybean has higher margins, for cotton they are the same, and for wheat they are lower. However, in terms of return on investment for organic and agro ecological farming, these are comparable for all crops which is an important for farmers needing liquidity. In Bolivia, intercropping cocoa and banana / plantain production lead to higher production of the latter when compared with mono-cropping, This is positive for family nutrition, moreover because the costs of mono-cropping are higher even though conventional agriculture may provide higher revenue when it is just producing commodity crops. Return on investment for labour is higher for agroforestry than it is for monoculture, and resource use efficiency is lower for monoculture. So whereas the results show that there is no silver bullet, organic agriculture does provide important solutions for smallholders. It is also worth noting

that for the total research budget for food and farming systems, less than 1% goes to agroecology or organic systems. Despite this, EUROSTAT figures show that the total surface area under organic agriculture has increased (target 2.4.1) but as yet, it is not included in development policy, which would be a valuable next step.

The final presentation was given by **Carin Smaller**, Team Leader Agriculture & Investment, IISD, Co-Director, CERES 2030, a partnership between IISD, IFPRI and Cornell University. This is a project that tries to combine economic modelling with a review of evidence of the most effective ways to achieve SDG2, in order to provide donors with options for how they can make better investment decisions to achieve this SDG. They focus on targets 2.1 in undernourishment, 2.3 on income and productivity for smallholders and 2.4 on sustainable agriculture. They do this by integrating all these targets into their economic models and then also reviewing the literature and policies which have been successful, with a focus on finding evidence of a qualitative nature allowing this evidence to be plugged back into the economic models and generate cost estimates. The evidence reviews is a series of eight systematic reviews that will be published as a special edition of the peer reviewed journal "Nature". The eight topics were selected by a panel of experts during consultations and machine learning on targets 2.3 and 2.4. Some of the topics considered included reducing pre-and post-harvest losses for smallholder

farmers, livestock interventions for integrated farming systems, water scarcity, and intervention to support income generation for rural youth. The modelling framework, on which the design of the economic model is structured, is based on early work by IISD and IFPRI. It takes the results of SDG 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 household survey and uses a computable general equilibrium model to give a macro and micro view of the situation. This is an additional process to translate the indicators into qualitative targets. This project began in 2018, and this year it focuses on building an evidence base and designing the evidence framework to generate costs at an individual level, a country level and a global level.

During **Questions and Answers**, on the issue of whether the global community is on track to meet the SDG, **Carin Smaller** argued that even if we did not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a lot of progress was done in reducing global hunger during the last 30 years by 50%, but results in Africa have not been equal to those in Asia. However, it is true that the global community is not on track, therefore efforts need to be redoubled, especially by donors and governments, to increase their investments into SDGs. Mali is a good case because notwithstanding its current challenges, it has been successful at increasing the impact of economic development with solid benefits. **Daniel Ohonde** responded to a question on partnerships with the private sector and the appetite for the private sector food industry to

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produce sustainably and contribute to the SDGs. The entrepreneurs which AECF works with, in addition to their main priority which is profitability, have increasingly also focused on nutrition. However, the key challenge is that focusing primarily on nutrition often means that the products are classed as premium, and they then become unaffordable. **Modibo Traoré** also contributed to the response on the transition from MDGs to SDGs, noting that there are many additional dimensions to the SDGs which have to be considered. One possible issue is whether the global community has been too optimistic and whether the necessary level of coordination can be achieved. With respect to the question of increasing local rice productivity in Mali, he explained the complex economic, environmental and political factors which influence this but also highlighted that there is potential for this situation to be reversed in the future, although local rice would remain more expensive as imported rice as long as Mali does not produce its own fertiliser.

Viwanou Gnassounou concluded with some remarks emphasising partnerships under SDG17, as this is where added value can be realised through the Cotonou Agreement renegotiations and the synergies of the EU and ACP negotiating mandates, which are both tailored around the 2030 Agenda, and with over 100 countries represented in the UN, acting together can enable the ACP-EU countries to make a sizeable contribution. Reconsidering present debates around management models and the terminology used around the debates on food security and nutrition may also be critical. The private sector are also invited to engage in partnerships as smallholder farmers are not solely able to make all the changes necessary.

Michael Hailu closed the Briefing by thanking the chairs of the two session, and praised the discussions for taking what is a very broad topic and managing to narrow it down to some key recommendations and concerns, including the complexity of tracking progress on SDG2, the need

to look at the whole food system and not only the issue of productivity, the dynamics around data and how to collect it and coordination. This point also came out of the Biennial review of the Malabo Declaration. Capacity building also needs to take place at national and local levels, and the role of the private sector and other stakeholders needs to be enhanced. The insight from the presenters was very valuable. Finally, the audience was informed on the topic of the next Briefing will focus on a specific area of digitalisation, namely Blockchain in Agriculture.

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- Reader: <https://bit.ly/2CJ5YQ1>
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