

# SDG Insider Ep 5 Transcript:

## The growing importance of agriculture and fishing in ending hunger and poverty

[00:00:00] **Ayanda Charlie:** Every day we move nearer to reaching the global goals of ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring that all people can live in peace and prosperity by 2030. But how close are we, really? Welcome to the SDG Insider, the series that helps bridge the gaps between corporate reporting and the sustainability agenda from the Global Reporting Initiative.

[00:00:24] **Ayanda Charlie:** We hope to help businesses navigate the 17 sustainable development goals with resources and guidance for taking action. The industries of agriculture, aquaculture, and fishing are fundamental to feeding the world. Globally, over 60 billion terrestrial animals are reared each year for human consumption.

[00:00:46] **Ayanda Charlie:** Aquaculture farms produce 52 million tons of aquatic animals, representing half of all seafood consumed by humans worldwide. Not only do these activities help meet the ever-growing demand for nutritious, affordable, and [00:01:00] safe food, but they also have significant impacts on sustainable development, too. For example, agriculture accounts for an estimated 70% of freshwater withdrawals globally and 22% of total greenhouse gas emissions.

[00:01:15] **Ayanda Charlie:** Over 2.5 billion people living in rural areas depend on agricultural production for jobs and livelihoods. At the same time, many of them have to contend with informal and insecure employment contracts, commercial transactions that don't necessarily benefit them and unstable land tenure. And that's not to mention the prevalence of child labour or gender discrimination.

[00:01:40] **Audio Clip:** My name is Reekelitsoe Molapo from the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. In the 21st century, I still don't have access to land rights. When both my parents passed, the inheritance automatically went to my older brother. I believe It's important to involve women in land and [00:02:00] sustainability issues because women are already working the land. [00:02:04] When women own and manage land, they're able to benefit so many more people, not just themselves as individuals.

[00:02:11] **Ayanda Charlie:** Women and land ownership is still a contentious issue in the 21st century, alongside other challenges posed to human rights, which are at the centre of the 2030 agenda. In this episode of SDG Insider, we explore how food production on land and in water is central to the Sustainable Development Goals.

[00:02:33] **Ayanda Charlie:** When you consider that every person, everywhere on the planet, should eat every day, you start to see the impact of how our seeds, seafood, plants, livestock, and eggs are cultivated, by whom, under what conditions and for how much remuneration.

[00:02:50] **Ayanda Charlie:** I speak to Wilbert Flinterman, Katarina Mellström, Alba Graells Roca and David McInnes on the challenges that face us and how we can work to meet these

global goals. I'm your host, Ayanda Charlie. We'd like to think that companies wouldn't knowingly do harm to children. So how does it happen that vulnerable young people are exploited?

[00:03:11] **Audio Clip:** Hey, we're Tony's Chocolonely. We strive for 100% slave-free chocolate, not just our own chocolate, but chocolate all over the world. 20 years ago, the Harken Engle protocol was signed where the chocolate industry pledged to end all illegal labour in the cocoa chain. So that should have all happened long ago. [00:03:33] In reality, the opposite is real. Many people in the West African cocoa chain still live far below the poverty line.

[00:03:43] **Ayanda Charlie:** The agriculture, aquaculture and fishing sectors have the highest share of child labour compared to all other sectors. Some brands in this space have built their business models and marketing messages around 100% exploitation-free supply chains.

[00:03:56] **Ayanda Charlie:** However, even big brands who have committed to [00:04:00] eradicating illegal labour from their supply chain have been known to uncover instances of it, like Tony's Chocolonely discovered in 2022. I asked Katarina Mellström, Secretary General of Global Child Forum, to weigh in. So, Katarina, most companies commit to eliminating child labour, yet in the agriculture sector, the issue still is pretty widespread.

[00:04:24] **Ayanda Charlie:** What are the challenges on the path toward eliminating child labour?

[00:04:29] **Katarina Mellström:** Well eliminating child labour in this sector is very complex and it requires a lot of coordinated efforts. Many companies express their commitment to child labour. But the issue remains, particularly in these sectors. In many rural areas, families rely on agriculture as their primary source of income, and poverty forces children to engage in [00:05:00] labour.

[00:05:00] **Katarina Mellström:** because they need to contribute to their family's income and often at the expense of their education and well-being. Also, social norms and traditions can normalise child labour, making it difficult to shift mindsets and practices. So community engagement and awareness campaigns are often needed to address this and changing mindsets normally takes time.

[00:05:34] **Katarina Mellström:** Another challenge is that the agriculture sector is very often characterised by complex and fragmented supply chains that involve multiple suppliers and sometimes also globalised supply chains involving multiple stakeholders across different countries. And that, of course, makes it even [00:06:00] more difficult to enforce consistent labour standards and ensure compliance throughout the entire supply chain.

[00:06:10] **Ayanda Charlie:** Under the emerging due diligence laws, companies will be liable for negative impacts in their supply chains. How effective are due diligence policies when it comes to children's rights?

[00:06:22] **Katarina Mellström:** Well, introducing new due diligence policies, such as the EU's corporate sustainability due diligence directive, as well, I would say as several national initiatives, such as in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Norway.

[00:06:43] **Katarina Mellström:** Will hopefully have a significant implication for companies, because these policies aim to hold companies accountable for negative impacts within their supply chains, including issues related to child labour. [00:07:00] And just recently, the UN Committee made a historic call for action on children's rights to a clean and sustainable environment.

[00:07:11] **Katarina Mellström:** urging nations to take action in safeguarding children's environmental rights. And I think this is very good. And we hope that it will, together, of course, with other initiatives have a positive effect, but that remains to be seen.

[00:07:31] **Ayanda Charlie:** Indeed it is. What should a company do if they discover child labour in their supply chain?

[00:07:38] **Katarina Mellström:** Well, to discover this is of course a very serious ethical, legal concern, and companies should of course take immediate actions and first of all, give support to affected children. And when that is done, they need to comply with standards and ensure [00:08:00] that improvements are monitored regularly to avoid that it happens again.

[00:08:08] **Katarina Mellström:** I would say that addressing child labour in the supply chain is a long-term commitment and it requires dedication. It requires resources and collaborations with various stakeholders and companies must not only take immediate corrective actions but also, and I think that is even more important work towards systematic changes to prevent child labour and protect children's rights throughout their supply chains.

[00:08:42] **Ayanda Charlie:** Now, because of climate change, costs for farmers may be rising, creating further risks of children being engaged for work. How does providing a living wage help address the issue of child labour?

[00:08:57] **Katarina Mellström:** The short answer is living wage [00:09:00] helps.

[00:09:00] **Katarina Mellström:** It is a crucial step towards addressing the issue of child labour, particularly in sectors like agriculture that are vulnerable to climate change impacts. A living wage ensures that workers and then including parents earn enough to meet their basic needs and to support their families. And when parents earn a living wage, they are more likely to send their children to school instead of engaging them in labour.

[00:09:37] **Katarina Mellström:** And this leads to better access to education. And that is in itself a key factor in preventing child labour. By providing families with the means to support themselves without relying on child labour, a living wage helps to break the cycle of [00:10:00] poverty. So living wage practices also contribute to community development because they foster economic stability empower local economies and of course support the overall well-being of the community and stronger communities.

[00:10:21] **Katarina Mellström:** are much more equipped to address root causes of child labour.

[00:10:28] **Ayanda Charlie:** There are 500 million smallholder farmers in the agriculture sector, and in some regions, they produce up to 80% of all agricultural products. However, many of these farmers live in poor and rural areas where communities face economic and social exclusion due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of technology, limited production capacity, or limited access to markets and finance, all of which impact children and create risks of child labour.

[00:10:57] **Ayanda Charlie:** As recognised by the Universal Declaration of [00:11:00] Human Rights, all workers have a right to just remuneration that ensures an existence worthy of human dignity for themselves and their families. In reality, workers in agriculture, aquaculture and fishing are over four times more likely to be in poverty than those in other sectors, which is why getting a living wage is so important to help reduce inequality and poverty.

[00:11:23] **Ayanda Charlie:** In many countries, wage workers in the agriculture, aquaculture and fishing sectors fall outside of minimum wage regulations, are classified as self-employed or can be compensated by a share of their catch or harvest instead of wages. Making them more vulnerable to undercompensation. Wilbert Flintermann, Senior Advisor for Workers' Rights and Trade Union Relations for Fair Trade International, told me more about these issues.

[00:11:51] **Ayanda Charlie:** Wilbert, firstly, what is the difference between minimum wage, a living wage and a living income?

[00:11:58] **Wilbert Flintermann:** Minimum wage is usually, [00:12:00] um, uh, a wage level, a wage benchmark set by the government as put into law, uh, as a minimum protection of, of workers in a country, sometimes in a sector, uh, sometimes in a sort of a sub-national jurisdiction, like a, like a state or something like that.

[00:12:19] **Wilbert Flintermann:** But usually there's a single minimum wage for, for a single country. It's based on, uh, usually a basic needs analysis that is then, um, uh, being affected by considerations of competitiveness, economic feasibility, uh, employment and so on and so forth. And the ability of the country to attract investment.

[00:12:42] **Wilbert Flintermann:** So what I'm trying to point at is that a minimum wage is, is generally a political compromise. A living wage, on the other hand, is, is a human rights concept. So it's an estimation of the cost of living in a particular place at a [00:13:00] particular time of what people need to earn from employment in order to meet a decent standard of living.

[00:13:07] **Wilbert Flintermann:** So it's good to understand that it's a rights-based concept. And basically, the international labour rights standards of the ILO feed into living wage estimations. The living income is the same thing, but it's the money not earned through wages, but through the income from a business and usually, that is at the level of a family.

[00:13:30] **Ayanda Charlie:** What is the current state of play when it comes to agricultural workers' wages?

[00:13:35] **Wilbert Flintermann:** So in many parts of the world, we see that, uh, agricultural workers wages are depressed because of a lack of, uh, uh, legal protection of agricultural

workers, a lack of representation by trade unions, and, uh, a high degree of informality and vulnerability of those workers.

[00:13:55] **Wilbert Flintermann:** Um, we see also a lot of migrant labour in agriculture, [00:14:00] seasonal, uh, labour. Usually, it's very high levels of feminisation. So a lot of women, uh, and all that, uh, contributes basically to a high degree of vulnerability and a lack of economic options and a lack of ability for workers to collectively bargain for better wages.

[00:14:19] **Ayanda Charlie:** Prices may be subject to volatile market forces and can be set without accounting for weather, diseases, or other unforeseen circumstances that reduce production. Farmers and fishers can be pressured to cut production costs by lowering their labour costs, which may lead to exploitation. This is something consumers would do well to remember.

[00:14:41] **Ayanda Charlie:** If a product is very cheap, usually somebody vulnerable is paying the real cost. Wilbert told me more. Wilbert, what kind of information can help address the earnings issue?

[00:14:54] **Wilbert Flintermann:** Well, information about wages paid, transparency around, um, wage [00:15:00] levels, but also hours of work, gender to understand if there is a gender wage gap, for instance, whether there are young workers, for instance.

[00:15:10] **Wilbert Flintermann:** Um, but also the origin of the workers. So, uh, to understand if vulnerabilities are relatively high because relatively many workers are, are migrant, all these effects are, are relevant to, to understand what basically determines the wages that, that are common in a particular agricultural sector. The level of informality is, is, is clearly important.

[00:15:38] **Wilbert Flintermann:** So we'd like to know if workers are properly registered and recognised. We'd like to know if, if workers are being subcontracted, the incidence of employment agencies and labour brokers is very, is very relevant, again, to understand whether workers are protected [00:16:00] by minimum wages and so on and whether there is actually visibility of a particular workforce for legal enforcement agencies can check if laws are being implemented.

[00:16:15] **Ayanda Charlie:** To what extent does Fairtrade see companies reports?

[00:16:20] **Wilbert Flintermann:** Well, Fairtrade operates several standards that are audited on a regular basis. So, in the course of this process, of this, this verification process, actually the companies comply with our standards. Organisations and companies have to submit data about their workforce, about the labour conditions and terms of employment and so on and so forth.

[00:16:47] **Wilbert Flintermann:** That information is not public, um, but is seen by the auditor and based on that the auditor would draw conclusions regarding compliance and would require any [00:17:00] corrective measures following non-compliance with our standard. And it means, it means more than compliance with a particular standard. It means also that farmers and producers receive a fair minimum price for, their goods, which, which allows them actually to improve social conditions, uh, in the workplace.

[00:17:22] **Wilbert Flintermann:** And, and that is a critical aspect. So besides the fact that we have social codes in place, uh, to make sure that there is a minimum standard for social conditions. We also, uh, require a fair distribution of value across the supply chain through our Fairtrade minimum price setting and the premium that we also acquire, uh, buyers of Fairtrade products to pay to the producer.

[00:17:52] **Ayanda Charlie:** To drive more consistent data disclosure, GRI has developed the GRI 13 agriculture, aquaculture [00:18:00] and fishing 2022 - a tool for companies to report on child labour, non-discrimination, occupational health and safety, living wage and economic inclusion. This addresses SDG target 8.7 to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

[00:18:25] **Ayanda Charlie:** And by 2025, end child labour in all its forms. This tool also addresses target 16.2, which is to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence and torture against children. Let's move now from the people working on our land down to the land itself. One of the complexities we have to deal with in this space is using our precious natural resources efficiently to deliver food for all.

[00:18:53] **Ayanda Charlie:** Reducing food loss is one of the key policy objectives in this regard. The UN estimates that [00:19:00] globally 14% of food is lost from harvest to retail, often due to inefficiencies at different stages of the supply chain.

[00:19:11] **Audio Clip:** We have to realise that for this food to be produced anywhere in the world, a high amount of precious natural resources are being used, like land and water. And a lot of energy is being used with the equivalent emission of greenhouse gases. And if this is all done for nothing, because the food is not being eaten, that is something that we cannot, uh, allow to happen.

[00:19:36] **Ayanda Charlie:** We need to address food loss as a global issue to help improve food security and prevent the loss of resources. Someone who's an expert on this topic is Alba Graells Roca, a Technical Expert on Food Loss and Food Waste at the Catalan Ministry of Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda. Alba, what are the existing policies on food loss and food waste in the [00:20:00] European Union, and are they adequately covering food loss as well as food waste?

[00:20:06] **Alba Graells Roca:** So in the European Union, there's the Waste Framework Directive that says the basic concepts and definitions related to waste management. So that covers food waste. And this directive was last amended in 2018, where the European Parliament required member states, uh, different obligations, right? The first one was to reduce food waste at the stage of the food supply chain and to monitor food waste levels.

[00:20:39] **Alba Graells Roca:** The other obligations also were to prepare food waste, uh, prevention programs, encourage food donation and other redistribution for human consumption. Also, always prioritising human use over animal feed or the processing into non-food products in the [00:21:00] industry and then another requirement was to provide incentives for the application of waste hierarchy facilitation and in the first part of food donation.

[00:21:13] **Alba Graells Roca:** After this Waste Framework Directive, the Commission Delegated made a decision in 2018 regarding a common methodology and minimum requirements for the uniform measurement to measure food waste. This delegated decision asks all Member States To report data on food waste on primary production, processing, manufacturing, retail, and other distribution of food, restaurants, food services, and households.

[00:21:46] **Alba Graells Roca:** But this doesn't cover food losses. So answering your question, there is an exclusion of food losses on this, uh, delegated decision of the European Commission. [00:22:00] Further on that, the European Union doesn't have yet a clear definition of food losses.

[00:22:06] **Ayanda Charlie:** And what can you share about promising or developing policies in Spain or Catalonia?

[00:22:15] **Alba Graells Roca:** So in Spain, there's a law that is on draft, so I cannot talk a lot about that. But in Catalonia, there's a penal law against food loss and food waste that was approved in 2020. So it was one of the first laws in Europe about food loss and food waste. This law, the main objective is to establish preventive actions for reducing food loss and food waste.

[00:22:42] **Alba Graells Roca:** Through all the food supply chain and, uh, states different obligations for the food chain companies, social entities, and other nonprofit organisations that are dedicated to food distribution. Very briefly, the main [00:23:00] obligations are to have a food loss and waste prevention plan and to implement it, to reduce, measure, and annually report the quantity of food loss and waste.

[00:23:11] **Alba Graells Roca:** And then you need to account for the food products that are intended for free distribution or to animal feed. With this law also the Catalan government has to develop a strategic plan with the aim of reducing food loss and food waste.

[00:23:27] **Ayanda Charlie:** One of the problems of confronting food loss is getting conclusive data and being able to compare it across countries.

[00:23:37] **Ayanda Charlie:** Alba told me more about this. What does the data that you collect on food loss tell us and how accurate is it?

[00:23:46] **Alba Graells Roca:** The data on food loss tells us that we need to work more on preventing food loss and food waste. Actually, in Catalonia, what we do is we collect data on food loss and food waste with one of [00:24:00] our research centres on economics and agro-rural development.

[00:24:03] **Alba Graells Roca:** What we do is a diagnosis for different types of food commodities or food products. We have been working on, uh, fruits and vegetables, the fish sector, and this year what we are doing is working on the milk and meat sector. So the data we actually collect is food loss at the primary stage and then food waste in all the different states of the food supply chain.

[00:24:31] **Alba Graells Roca:** But I would like to, uh, highlight that also what we try to do is in the, in the primary sector is that we quantificate the crops that are left in the field that are not harvested. Because we realise that a lot of crops are left in the field and are not harvested and we want to know why this is happening.

[00:24:53] **Alba Graells Roca:** And, uh, that data we collect is mainly quantifications on-site in farms, [00:25:00] but also what we do is then we do surveys with primary producers, uh, retailers and all the food stakeholders.

[00:25:11] **Ayanda Charlie:** By managing natural resources sustainably, in line with Goal 12, responsible consumption and production, agriculture has the potential to contribute to Goal 15, life on land.

[00:25:23] **Ayanda Charlie:** And the aquaculture and fishing sectors can contribute to Goal 14, life below water. Resilient fishing and farming practices can also build the adaptive capacity to respond to Goal 13, climate action. It's interesting to notice the thread running through all of our conversations so far, data. I turn to David McInnes to talk about why corporate data is important.

[00:25:49] **Ayanda Charlie:** David is the founder and national coordinator of Canada's National Index on Agri-Food Performance. David, can you tell us briefly about the aims [00:26:00] of the National Agri-Food Index of Canada?

[00:26:03] **David McInnes:** Well, thanks for your question. The National Index on Agri-Food Performance is a Canadian first. It's the first time that the agri-food sector as a whole has come together to try to better measure and define sustainability.

[00:26:18] **David McInnes:** There are 135 private and public partners that have come together to do this. So these partners represent producers, processors, retailers, uh, governments at all levels in this country, social, indigenous, and environmental NGOs, financial institutions, and innovation organisations and I know once I start making a list, I'm going to leave someone off.

[00:26:43] **David McInnes:** Uh, but the partnership and coalition are quite unprecedented in their size ambition and scope. What they're doing is defining for the first time a reporting framework for agri-food sustainability. The intent is to [00:27:00] align the sector on how it ought to measure sustainability and report on consolidated results based on some four blocks of sustainability.

[00:27:12] **David McInnes:** So this includes, obviously, the environment, but also social sustainability, food safety and food integrity, and economic sustainability. And there are 20 indicators and over 130 metrics to do so.

[00:27:27] **Ayanda Charlie:** And David, why the choice to select agriculture as a sector to make the benchmark?

[00:27:34] **David McInnes:** Well, the essential reason is that this was bottom-up driven.



[00:27:38] **David McInnes:** I come from the sector and really it was this desire amongst a number of agri-food leaders in this country recognising the sea shift that's upon all of us around how do we produce, supply, and consume food more sustainably. And there was this real burning [00:28:00] desire to step back and ask the question, how do we know that we are sustainable?

[00:28:05] **David McInnes:** And if we have better insight on that, what can we do with that information? How do we leverage this in policy and the marketplace, uh, with investors and with consumers among others? And so this desire for a much broader, holistic response to measuring sustainability really motivated folks to come together.

[00:28:26] **Ayanda Charlie:** And to what extent has the Canadian government backed the benchmark?

[00:28:30] **David McInnes:** Well, they're one of the partners. In fact, there are three levels of government involved. They are part of the broader food system. So if I consider the sector to be those in the supply chain, the food system enables those from government to

[00:28:49] **David McInnes:** Financial services, NGOs and so forth, academia, uh, and researchers and others. And so right now we have, uh, several federal departments involved [00:29:00] in our index. We have seven provinces and two municipal initiatives. Government, like many other partners, are, therefore, uh, contributors to the dialogues. They contribute data and they're a funder as well.

[00:29:14] **Ayanda Charlie:** What kind of policy outcomes can a benchmark like this generate?

[00:29:19] **David McInnes:** Well, there is considerable significance. If you think about it, all sustainability-related policy drivers require evidence. You cannot talk about sustainability targets, strategy, or programs without better data to mark, to either inform where you are, or to illuminate, uh, the progress where, uh, where it needs to go, to identify the shortcomings, and where things are working well.

[00:29:45] **David McInnes:** So data is fundamental, and in fact, one of the big surprises in our work as this coalition grew when we were coming designing this index, one of the big surprises was that not only did this [00:30:00] coalition agree on what to measure, but we started to agree on what the data gaps are. And there are data gaps across all 20 of our indicators.

[00:30:10] **David McInnes:** This shouldn't be a surprise to anyone on this call because we're all trying to get better data. But nevertheless, by having a greater alignment on the data gaps, we're almost triaging what work needs to happen next to improve the index. And by extension, as we get better data, we can inform, we hope, uh, policymaking, decisionmaking, strategy development.

[00:30:37] **David McInnes:** And this has significance because governments, among other players in the food system, are setting targets on sustainability, climate disclosures, social requirements, uh, and other environmental indicators, food safety, animal care, and so forth. And so what we're thinking where this could go is with better-shared data or evidence in

hand, in part [00:31:00] helped enabled by this index, this may help to illuminate or define what might be priority research and development priorities to help improve sustainability.

[00:31:11] **David McInnes:** It may inform regulatory and trade policy. Because now we have better evidence around sustainability. It could enable how we're thinking about building, uh, consumer outreach, because consumer trust is so fundamental in the food system. It may, for example, better inform risk assessments, either for government programming or being used in the private sector.

[00:31:35] **Ayanda Charlie:** The complexities and far-reaching implications of what we've heard today can feel overwhelming. Whether it's the women who need their land rights to be recognised, or the rights and concerns of workers who grow, harvest and catch our daily food or the children stuck in abusive labour situations – the move towards doing better is essential.

[00:31:57] **Ayanda Charlie:** Something we've known for a long time is that profit alone cannot be what drives companies, and what's become clear is that accurate and consistent reporting is vital. Relatively small and consistent steps in the right direction will hopefully create greater momentum and bring us closer to achieving the SDGs by 2030.

[00:32:19] **Ayanda Charlie:** Thank you for tuning into another episode of The SDG Insider. Join us again for more topics related to the Global Goals and be sure to click the subscribe button so that you don't miss any upcoming episodes. If you've been listening to these episodes and enjoying them, why not leave us a 5-star review?

[00:32:38] **Ayanda Charlie:** For more information on the Global Reporting Initiative, visit [www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org). Until next time. This podcast is produced by 2Stories for the Global Reporting Initiative. Written by Linda Scarborough, and produced by Carol Williams, with audio editing, engineering and sound design by Kozi Mzimela.

[00:33:00] **Ayanda Charlie:** Thanks to the UNCCD, Tony's Chocolonely and FOA for the audio clips used in this episode. For more information on references used, please refer to the show notes.