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PROGRAMME



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## Setting effective and functional, SDG-consistent, transformational pathways for agro-food chains using a flexible multi-objective, stakeholder-participatory backcasting approach

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The United Nations (UN) chose Uruguay as the first case study for implementing a new set of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under the Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems (SAFS) thematic network of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and the support of the Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI). In 2006, the international team in charge of the initiative issued the first report with the Agricultural Transformation Pathways (ATP) for Uruguay and the other two selected study cases: U.K. and China. The methodological approach was inspired in a previous work coordinated by SDSN and IDDRI. Used for the first time at country-level, this approach recognizes two main pillars: (i) strong commitment and active participation of key stakeholders from both public and private sectors; (ii) step-by-step “backcasting” method. The first pillar put special emphasis on the participatory building of pathways by stakeholders and experts already involved in the national policy debate. It includes key stakeholders from academic institutions, industry associations, farmer organizations, civil society, and government. The objective is achieving three goals: (i) bring knowledge to the project by consulting national experts and practitioners; (ii) foster policy debates on the important issues facing the country; and (iii) generate buy-in among stakeholders, which is fundamental to overcome a number of sociological and political roadblocks to transition. The second pillar involves the so-called “backcasting” approach for “building a vision of the future we want”. It denotes a process in which a desired target is set for a future date, and then identifies the best pathway towards achieving that target by moving backward in time. A specific challenge when building pathways for the agro-food sector is that sustainable agricultural transformation must take into account and prioritize a raft of targets. Win-win solutions may not exist for some agriculture-related targets, and trade-offs are therefore to be expected. Effective and functional sustainable development pathways for agro-food systems can only result from a political choice concerning these trade-offs and priorities; it needs to be debated and decided at the national or local scale, taking into account the specific conditions of countries and regions. In this paper, we present useful evidence and learned lessons emerged from the Uruguay case. We focus on the empirical construction of ATPs consistent with the SDGs for two contrasting agro-food chains included in the study: beef and rice. A reduced number of well-organized high-technology farmers and millers comprises Uruguay rice chain. Both parties have a history of integrated work in many aspects of the production system, which made possible developing an ATP without any public intervention. On the other hand, the Uruguayan beef sector includes a large number of cattlemen, slaughter and packing plants lacking any associative culture. Thus, setting an effective ATP was a more complex task, requiring an important effort of academy and public authorities in creating the incentives to bring all private stakeholders to a minimum necessary degree of commitment.