

PFM intervention at the CFS High Level Forum on *Tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation through the right to food*

12 May, 09:00 – 17:00 at FAO HQ

What are areas of specific interest for philanthropic foundations in the overlapping areas of the Rio Conventions and the right to food, and for which reasons?

Thank you, Chair, for giving me the floor.

I have the privilege—and the challenge—of being one of the last speakers today. A challenge, because much has already been said, and I'll try not to be repetitive. But also a privilege, because I can build on many of the insightful contributions made and offer a unique perspective—that of philanthropy.

My name is Matheus Alves Zanella. I'm a Senior Advisor for Global Fora at the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, a strategic alliance of nearly 30 philanthropic organizations working together to transform food systems. I also speak on behalf of the Philanthropic Foundations Mechanism for the CFS, a platform recently created to represent the voice and diversity of philanthropies engaging in this space.

So, in the spirit of avoiding repetition, let me skip the part about why the right to food is essential to achieving the Rio Conventions—I'm sure we all agree on that. Let me also skip the part about why a food system transformation is needed to achieve those - I'm also sure that the vast majority of us agree on that.

In the spirit of avoiding just affirming commitments, and moving into action, I will focus on three things:

1. What we see as the **unique value of philanthropy** in financing this food systems transformation;
2. Highlight **three strategic areas** where we are currently investing that align with the objectives of today's discussion; and

3. Offer a few thoughts on how we might **strengthen coordination and implementation, particularly through the CFS.**

First: Philanthropy's Value Added

Philanthropic foundations bring **flexible, risk-tolerant, and catalytic capital** to the table. We often fund emerging, underfunded, or politically sensitive areas—such as agroecology, land rights, and community-led governance—where public and private finance may be less willing or able to go.

Of course, there is **diversity within philanthropy**. But for the topic at hand, many of us are aligned in prioritizing justice-oriented, rights-based approaches. We seek to back actors and initiatives often excluded from mainstream financing—especially **small-scale family producers, Indigenous peoples, and women-led organizations**.

Philanthropy can also serve as a **connector**—co-designing and co-financing with public and private institutions, bridging across silos, and improving the **quality of finance**, not just the quantity. We emphasize grants and non-debt instruments that align with principles of equity, rights, and ecological regeneration.

Second: Strategic Areas of Investment

Let me now turn to three key areas of work where philanthropic foundations are active—and which I believe are highly relevant to this Forum.

1. Agroecological Transitions

We see agroecology and regenerative food systems as some of the most promising pathways to address the interlinked crises of climate, biodiversity, and hunger.

Agroecological transitions generate **co-benefits** across adaptation, mitigation, soil health, water systems, and agrobiodiversity. But they also require bold shifts—including the **repurposing of harmful agricultural subsidies**—to support diversified, territorial food systems.

One example is a collaboration we created called RAFT—where 32 philanthropic organizations working to accelerate agroecological and regenerative transformation aligned with all three Rio Conventions, calling for a 10x increase in funding for this. Another key collaboration we are deeply involved in is the Agroecology Coalition, which my colleague from Switzerland has commented on before.

2. Agrobiodiversity in Agricultural Landscapes

While philanthropy has traditionally focused on biodiversity in protected areas—such as conservation zones and Indigenous lands—we recognize that we need to increase investments in agrobiodiversity in agricultural and mixed-use landscapes.

This includes support for **public agricultural research**, the **upholding of farmers' rights to seeds**, and new Access and Benefit-Sharing mechanisms—like the Cali Fund and the fund under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Agrobiodiversity must be at the heart of food systems policy and financing, especially because of its deep connections to the CBD and the right to food. In this spirit, we have also developed a practical guidance on how countries can integrate agroecology into their biodiversity strategies—available at nbsap.futureoffood.org.

3. Land Rights and Tenure Security

Our network is increasingly supporting work on **land governance**—with a focus on **women's rights**, secure tenure, and community-led restoration.

Secure tenure is a cross-cutting enabler. It unlocks long-term land investments; it expands adaptation and response options rural communities have at hand; and sustainable resource management builds resilience and supports mitigation.

Third: Strengthening Interlinkages and the Role of the CFS

Finally, I want to stress the importance of interoperability between instruments. We advocate for stronger coordination across frameworks—for instance, **bridging CFS policy products with implementation mechanisms under the CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC** - [YCAARD]

And we welcome additional efforts to raise funding for food systems—such as the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. Colleagues have already commented on the Alliance recently released guidance note on **NDCs and another on financing for development**, highlighting points such as the centrality of country-led, large-scale programs; the urgency of food systems transformation; and the need to invest in climate-resilient food systems. It's only through more collaboration that we will be able to raise the profile of food systems in climate, biodiversity, and land discussions.

CFS policy products already provide concrete, practical guidance to support these goals. It's up to all of us in the CFS community to **showcase and mobilize around these tools**.

In conclusion, let me end with a reflection.

Many of the interventions we support—agroecology, tenure reform, agrobiodiversity—are still high-risk. We know that this makes it difficult for governments to design and fund large-scale policies, and for private actors to commit their resources.

We are not here to replace those actors (governments, and business)—we lack the scale and the mandate for that. But we can take risks, test new models, and de-risk the field for others to follow.

And we must also be careful: the **quality of finance matters**. Poorly designed investments—especially debt-based ones—risk further harming those who are already disproportionately impacted by the climate and biodiversity crises.

We believe that the most innovative, grounded, and socially embedded solutions are already emerging—from family farmers' movements, fisherfolks, Indigenous peoples, and civil society. They help realize the Right to Food. They protect our climate, biodiversity, and land. **Our task is to elevate those voices, support their leadership, and ensure they are at the center of food systems transformation.**

Thank you.