

Meeting Report: Netherlands Food Partnership (NFP) World Food Day 2023 | Informality matters: the role of the largest private sector in creating sustainable food systems

Date: October 17, 2023
Location: Amersfoort, De Rijtuigenloods
Participants: 25 participants in person, including representatives from government, NGOs, research and educational institutions
Recording: [\[link\]](#)
Intro video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zm9oWubnKE>
Speakers: Shitandi Omukuba, Project Manager, Bopinc
Charles Dhewa Chief Executive Officer, Knowledge Transfer Africa (KTA)
Gupta Banjara, Project Manager, SNV

Meeting Report Summary:

The hybrid side event "Informality matters: the role of the largest private sector in creating sustainable food systems", took place during the Netherlands Food Partnership's World Food Day event on October 12, 2023, with a focus on understanding the informal sector's role in food systems and identifying constructive ways to collaborate.

Highlights and calls to action:

- **Understand Before Acting:** The speakers emphasised the importance of understanding and recognising the informal sector, as it has unique characteristics and often operates in a blend of formal and informal elements. Instead of rushing into action, it's important to first understand how informal food systems operate effectively by engaging with informal operators, finding out what works for them, and what doesn't.
- **Recognize the Value:** Acknowledge the intrinsic value of the informal food sector and its role in ensuring affordable, nutritious, safe food to consumers doing so in adverse circumstances.
- **Adaptive Thinking and Acting:** The speakers highlighted the need for adaptive thinking and the ability to adapt to the dynamics and needs of informal markets and their operators.
- **Innovative Adaptations:** The discussions included numerous examples of the innovative power and adaptative capacity of the informal sector, such as vendors using M-PESA to support their businesses.
- **Cultural and Social Aspects:** The speakers underlined that informality is deeply intertwined with cultural, social, and even spiritual dimensions, and understanding these aspects is crucial. The connection between food and culture was highlighted, such as the role of informal goat markets in cultural and social practices.
- **Recognising and Empowering Indigenous Pathways and Dignification:** The event stressed the need to recognise the informal sector as a legitimate and dignified part of the economy, worthy of study, engagement and support. The speakers urged scholars, funders, and policymakers to invest in understanding and studying the informal sector, respecting its indigenous pathways, and its unique contributions to the economy.
- **Recognise Informal Governance Structures and Organisations:** Recognising that informal markets have their own governance structures that can empower them to advocate for their rights and interact with others, like governments, effectively.
- **Work with Local Governments:** Encourage collaboration between informal food actors and municipal governments to address challenges in local food systems.
- **Recognize Diversity:** Recognise the diversity and layers within the informal sector instead of treating it as a single, homogeneous entity.
- **Consider Partnership with Appropriate Organizations:** For those in the development sector, consider collaborating with organizations that have experience and expertise in working with informal markets.

Closing and conclusions:

The event concluded with a call to recognise the importance of the informal food sector, understand how it operates, engage with its operators on their own terms, and empower them to have their voices heard. It was emphasized that working with informality is a vital step in transforming food systems effectively.

The speakers encouraged attendees to take a more inclusive and thoughtful approach to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the informal food sector. The discussion highlighted the importance of recognizing the informal sector's contributions, values, and potential, rather than simply trying to formalise it. The event also suggested that a change in mindset, better understanding,

engagement and more adaptive approaches are needed to effectively work with informality in food systems.