

Foodtopia meeting report



'Do what you do, do what you did, if you do what you like, then keep doing what you did. Thank God it is Foodtopia!' With this powerful encouragement Anil Joshi, chairman of the day, opened 'Foodtopia' at Ahold on 23 November.

The goal of Foodtopia, organized by Partners4change (P4C) in association with ICA, is to bring together visionary young professionals, managers and social entrepreneurs from different sectors – businesses, NGOs, governments and knowledge institutes. P4C aims to demonstrate that by working together, we can come up with smarter solutions to urgent sustainability challenges. This year, over 60 participants were asked to rack brains over issues related to **global malnutrition** and **food security**.

It is not easy to grasp the facts and contradictions apparent when we talk about this subject. The first plenary speaker, Paulus M. Verschuren, Special Envoy for Food and Nutrition at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presented the attendees with 'Foody Facts'. A billion people worldwide are underfed, while shockingly at the same time another billion are obese. Moreover, every year, 8 million children still die of malnutrition. According to Verschuren, we need to tackle these different problems with one food agenda, drawn up using a multi-stakeholder approach. Despite the big challenges ahead Verschuren is optimistic. The new generation truly understands that we have to tackle the issues together.

The second keynote speaker, Onno Franse, responsible for the Healthy Living program at Ahold, emphasized the need for big ideas and new models. He brought in ideas that could help young professionals in the steps that lie ahead. He urged the need for a common understanding of the topic. In a slightly less optimistic but rather realistic way, he pointed out that young professionals should not expect a big leap forward from large organizations. The change will come from smaller initiatives that will eventually persuade others.

After the two keynote speakers it was time to get active. The day ahead was all about 'doing it'. Before and after a nutritious lunch, participants were able to choose two out of six DO-IT sessions, facilitated by UNICEF, Unilever, The Hunger Project, ICCO, the Nationale Denktank and Schuttelaar & Partners. In the sessions, participants were asked by the facilitators to come up with new ideas and tools that could help them with their current sustainability endeavors.

At the *Schuttelaar & Partners* session, attendees were challenged with the problem of food waste. One-third of the food produced for human consumption is wasted in both developed and developing countries. At the same time, hundreds of millions of people across the globe are still suffering from chronic hunger.

Schuttelaar & Partners is aiming to organize a country-to-country project on reducing food waste, involving the Netherlands and Ethiopia. The organization should be based upon multi-stakeholder platforms in each country and partnerships to do the work. The question in the DO-IT session was: how can we activate both governments to join and co-fund, and how can we identify potential business partners? According to the attendees, there was a need to involve the local Ethiopian markets where Dutch companies could do business in partnerships and should provide agricultural knowledge. From the Dutch perspective there was consensus that Western countries need to re-evaluate their high food quality requirements.

In one of the other sessions, *UNICEF's* efforts are focused on the children at the 'Base of the Pyramid'. Their new campaign is focused on nutrition during the first critical 1000 days of children's lives. When young babies do not receive sufficient nutrients, their brains don't develop normally



with severe consequences. While micronutrients can easily be provided, UNICEF needs to get broader support to fund the nutrition program for young children. Especially the criteria to forge partnerships that would create ownership and sustainability by the end-users (the Base of the Pyramid). It was realized that programs should be focused in terms of solution and means to use; they should not too wide and big in order to be more manageable at the local level. Attendees in the session discussed the possibility of cooperating with companies that could help UNICEF to raise the demand of these nutritious products. Especially ways in which to involve more stakeholders within the Netherlands for the Scaling Up Nutrition Program were reviewed. With regard to the question of how to raise funds in the Netherlands, the 'parents-for-parents' approach was said to be very appealing. As participants got their teeth into this topic, time flew.

Unilever too is aiming to reduce global malnutrition. They believe that sustainable business will be the only acceptable way of doing business in the future. Unilever believes that scaling up nutrition in the countries involved will eventually lead to a higher demand for their products. Unilever asked the participants to come up with new ideas and models that are both sustainable and profitable in the long run.

Unilever has successfully implemented an Entrepreneurial Program in India that helps local women to set up small businesses, which creates new distribution channels. This could be a potential new model for the uptake of nutritious food. Notably, participants suggested various designs for franchise models that are locally supported and create win-win situations for stakeholders involved.

Despite the intensive morning and afternoon, the program continued with a plenary panel discussion with Janno Lanjouw (Youth Food Movement), Saskia Osendarp (Wageningen University) and Charlotte Pedersen (GAIN/AIM). Three experts in the field, discussing several statements such as: 'In the long run, business must be profitable rather than sustainable', and: 'Not every malnutrition issue has a business solution. Some charity will always be needed'. The participation of the attendees resulted in a lively discussion. Despite the eagerness of all, you could hear the silent call for a Friday afternoon drink.

While enjoying the drinks, attendees enthusiastically swapped business cards and shared their ideas about how they could increase their impact. The call for action had truly reached the ambitious and passionate people brought together at Ahold. Entirely in line with generation Y's ideals, they realized that working together is the only way to reach solutions.

Besides the valuable networking opportunity, the experts also contributed to the understanding of the complexity of global food challenges. Rather than briefly discussing all levels of the problem, Foodtopia successfully deepened a selection of critical issues by providing the attendees with the opportunity to contribute to the work of professionals in the field.

Foodtopia will hopefully encourage (senior-) professionals to increase and intensify the involvement of young people, so that they can benefit from their eagerness, spirit and creativity to solve the vital food and nutrition challenges our world is facing.

