WORLD AGRICULTURE FORUM

Report

Advancing Sustainable Agriculture: From Policy to Practice

Insights from the WAF Policy Dialogue
20 November 2025

Prepared By:

World Agriculture Forum

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Introduction

Sustainable agriculture is no longer a question of direction, but of delivery. Governments today broadly agree on the need for resilient, inclusive, and environmentally sound food systems. Policy frameworks have multiplied, scientific evidence is robust, and technological options continue to expand. Yet progress on the ground remains uneven and, in many cases, insufficient.

The constraint is not ambition. It is implementation.

Across regions, agricultural policies falter at the point where strategy meets systems. Institutions remain fragmented, incentives often reward short-term extraction, and delivery mechanisms struggle to integrate science, finance, and local realities. As agricultural challenges grow more complex, these structural weaknesses increasingly determine outcomes.

Why This Dialogue Matters Now

A Policy Dialogue was convened by World Agriculture Forum at a moment when delay carries visible consequences. Climate shocks are reshaping agricultural risk. Water and land constraints are tightening. Public resources are under pressure. At the same time, productivity growth is stabilizing in many countries, opening a narrow but critical opportunity to shift how agriculture grows, not just how much it produces.

The challenge today is not a lack of ideas. It is the organization of action. Implementation has emerged as the decisive test of sustainability, shaping whether policies reach farmers, whether investments change behavior, and whether evidence becomes impact. The discussion focused on this space where policy either takes root or quietly fails.

Speakers like Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, Former Prime Minister of Niger; Food Security Envoy, African Union (AU), Dr William Dar, Vice-Chair, World Agriculture Forum (WAF) Board; Former Secretary of Agriculture, Philippines; Former Director General, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Dr. Claudia Ringler, Director, Natural Resources and Resilience (NRR), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, examined how leadership aligns institutions, how incentives shape choices, how science enters governance, and how local contexts determine outcomes. The aim was not to prescribe a single model, but to understand what allows policy to move from paper into practice.

This report reflects that exchange and the lessons drawn from it. It invites policymakers, practitioners, and partners to look beyond strategies and ask a more demanding question. Are our systems built for the future we are trying to create.

> "Concepts evolve quickly; institutions evolve slowly. Implementation lives in the space between them."
>
> **Dr. Suresh Babu, Emeritus Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)**

Executive Summary

Global agriculture is at a turning point. Scientific consensus is strong, new technologies are available, and political commitments continue to grow, yet implementation remains the weakest link. Policies often stay aspirational while soils degrade, groundwater declines, and climate risks intensify. The gap between ambition and action has become structural, shaped by outdated institutions, fragmented governance, distorted incentives, and limited local capacity.

Across this dialogue, a clear storyline emerged: sustainable agriculture advances only when countries redesign the systems through which policy becomes practice. Reforms succeed when there is shared leadership across institutions, when communication builds trust, when financing reaches frontline actors, and when incentives across ministries align behind sustainability rather than undermine it. Without political leadership to coordinate sectors and adequate finance to support delivery, even science-based policies and strong strategies fail at implementation.

A global shift is underway. With productivity stabilizing and demographic pressures easing, countries now have room to move from growth-at-all-costs to long-term ecological resilience. Science is central to this transition—through soil diagnostics, climate-resilient seeds, digital agronomy, and data-driven monitoring embedded directly into delivery systems. Institutional arrangements that align policies, incentives, budgets, and accountability across agriculture, water, energy, climate, and food systems, from national planning to local delivery are equally essential. In practice, this means joint planning across ministries, shared targets and financing frameworks, coordinated data and monitoring systems, and empowered local institutions with clear responsibility for implementation. The Water–Energy–Food–Environment (WEFE) Nexus emerged from the dialogue as a practical framework to manage trade-offs and translate integration from principle into practice.

The dialogue also emphasized that transformation happens locally. When science, community institutions, and governance converge, sustainable practices scale. Implementation capacity will increasingly shape competitiveness, and the cost of inaction will rise as climate volatility worsens.
This report captures how these insights came together during the discussion and what they imply for future implementation efforts.

Context

Countries have built extensive strategies on food security and agricultural transformation, but implementation remains weak. Approaches have advanced quickly from farming systems to sustainable agriculture to food systems but institutions, incentives, and delivery structures have not kept up. This dialogue examined how to close the policy–practice gap and what must change for sustainability and productivity to move together.

Cross-Cutting Challenges

Three challenges cut across all contributions:

- Institutional misalignment: Agricultural concepts have evolved, yet government structures remain siloed and outdated.
- Distorted or weak incentives: Many current incentives encourage overextraction, resource depletion, or short-term gains.
- Gaps between science, policy, and local action: Evidence often informs strategy but not delivery systems, and communities are rarely included early enough.

These themes shaped the discussion and created a shared sense of what stands in the way of implementation.

Key Insights from the Dialogue

Implementation is a systems challenge, not a technical one	Policies falter not because solutions are unknown, but because institutions, incentives, and delivery mechanisms are misaligned. Implementation failures reflect how systems are organized, not gaps in strategy.
Agricultural concepts have outpaced institutional reform	Governments increasingly adopt food systems and sustainability language, yet ministries, mandates, and coordination mechanisms remain structured for older, sectoral models. This mismatch weakens execution.
Leadership determines whether multisectoral approaches work or collapse	Cross-sectoral coordination does not emerge organically. It requires political authority, clear accountability, and sustained leadership to align agriculture, water, energy, environment, and finance.
Science influences outcomes only when embedded in delivery systems	Evidence shapes impact when it informs everyday decisions—soil management, seed choice, water use—not when it remains confined to strategies or research outputs.
Incentives often work against stated sustainability goals	Subsidies, pricing policies, and budget structures frequently reward resource depletion and short-term gains. Without incentive redesign, sustainability policies struggle to gain traction.
Local context determines success more than policy design	Uniform solutions rarely work across diverse ecological and socioeconomic conditions. Policies succeed when they allow adaptation, local ownership, and community participation.
Convergence matters more than isolated interventions	Sustainable outcomes emerge when water, seeds, extension, finance, and markets are addressed together. Partial or fragmented interventions deliver limited results.
Data and feedback loops are essential for adaptive implementation	Implementation capacity depends on the ability to monitor progress, learn from failure, and adjust course. Weak data systems lock policies into ineffective paths.

01 Bridging the Policy–Implementation Gap

The Institutional Disconnect: Why Evolving Agricultural Concepts Outpace Government Structures

Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki underscored a central paradox in agricultural transformation: while the language around sustainable agriculture, agroecology, and food systems has advanced, institutions have not kept pace. Across much of Africa, ministries of agriculture, environment, blue economy, and planning have not evolved alongside the concepts they now champion. The result, he argued, is a widening gap between strategic ambition and operational reality.

He traced this problem through the evolution of Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). While Maputo (2003) maintained a sectoral mindset, Malabo (2014) and Kampala (2025) embraced the food systems approach and its multisectoral logic. Yet, implementation has not reflected that shift. Policies remain top-down, with limited local participation and weak coordination across critical sectors such as nutrition, infrastructure, and environment.

This mismatch is not a technical failure; it is an institutional one. When institutions stagnate, implementation capacity collapses. Effective transformation requires coordination across actors and leadership that is embedded in day-to-day delivery, not only at the top. Without bold institutional innovation, frameworks will remain aspirational.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Institutional Disconnect in Africa's Agricultural Reform

The evolution of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which moved from sectoral frameworks in Maputo (2003) to more integrated visions in Malabo (2014) and Kampala (2025) reflects Africa's shift from sectoral agriculture strategies toward broader food systems and multisectoral thinking.

What went wrong
While concepts evolved, institutions largely did not. Ministries remained siloed, coordination weak, and policymaking often top-down with limited local participation. As a result, implementation lagged far behind strategy.

Why it matters
Without institutional reform, even the best-designed frameworks remain aspirational. Transformation requires political weight, cross-sector leadership, and delivery systems capable of turning multisectoral visions into real outcomes on the ground.

Example 1 | Institutional Disconnect in Africa's Agricultural Reform

> We speak the language of systems but still operate within silos turning multisectoral visions into multisectoral myths therefore widening the gap between ambition and reality."
> — Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki, Former Prime Minister of Niger; Food Security Envoy, AU

Embedding Science into Governance: Leadership and Institutional Mechanisms for Effective Delivery

Transitioning from governance challenges to practical actions, Dr. William Dar, stated that across the world, governments have articulated ambitious agricultural strategies, yet the real challenge today is ensuring coherent, science-based, institutionally anchored implementation. Drawing from his experiences at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and as Secretary of Agriculture in the Philippines, he stressed that agriculture transforms only when science transforms the field.

He highlighted three enablers of successful policy implementation:

1. Leadership and Institutional Coherence: Policies fail in fragmented systems. When agriculture, water, climate, trade, and finance ministries operate in silos, implementation weakens. But when leadership aligns these sectors under shared outcomes and accountability, transformation accelerates.
2. Strong Delivery Systems Anchored in Science and Evidence: Research must inform policies, policies must guide investments, and farmer feedback must continually refine systems. He underscored the importance of institutionalizing the science–policy–practice continuum.
3. Multisectoral Partnerships: Transformation requires governments, private sector, research institutions, civil society, and farmer organizations to act as co-drivers, not occasional participants.

He added that today's agriculture must be climate-resilient, water-secure, digitally enabled, and inclusive of women and youth, requiring systemic, not incremental reforms. Platforms like World Agriculture Forum (WAF), he said, are crucial conveners that help shift from policy intention to policy action grounded in science and shared leadership.

> Agriculture transforms when science leaves the laboratory and enters the field, carried by institutions that lead together and deliver together."
> — Dr. William Dar, Vice-Chair, World Agriculture Forum (WAF) Board; Former Secretary of Agriculture, Philippines; Former Director General, ICRISAT

Conditions for Real Change: Need, Awareness, Financing, and Aligned Incentives

Dr. Claudia Ringler brought the conversation from frameworks to field realities by outlining four conditions without which policy cannot produce real change.

1. There must be a real, recognized need: Policies fail when the people expected to implement them do not see the problem. A groundwater policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), she argued, will not work where groundwater depletion is not a lived reality.
2. People must understand and shape the change: Farmers cannot implement what they do not understand. From India's abandoned MSP reforms to failed land acquisition policies, weak consultation and poor communication can doom even sound policy ideas.
3. Financing must match ambition: Awareness of climate risks is high, but financing for climate-smart agriculture, especially for smallholders, remains largely symbolic. Without money, even the best policies stall.
4. Incentives must be aligned: Misaligned institutional incentives can sink well-funded reforms. In Central Asia, she noted, subsidized electricity for pumping water makes organizations resist efficient irrigation technologies because efficiency would shrink their budgets.

Her core message: transformation is impossible when incentives reward the old system.

> Even when need is clear and money is on the table; misaligned incentives can turn good policy into empty promise."
> — Dr. Claudia Ringler, Director, Natural Resources and Resilience (NRR), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Beyond Growth-Centric Agriculture: How Distorted Incentives and Ecological Misfits Fuel Sustainability Failures

Prof. Ramesh Chand reflected on a fundamental challenge in agriculture: many sustainability failures stem from agriculture's long-standing obsession with growth. When hunger was widespread, maximizing production at any cost was justified. Soil degradation, overexploited groundwater, and environmental trade-offs were largely ignored, and the Green Revolution embodied this resource-intensive, output-driven model.

Over time, this approach produced serious ecological distortions. Crops were promoted in unsuitable regions, weakening natural resource systems. In northwest India, for example, rice, once absent due to low rainfall now dominates summer cultivation, accelerating groundwater depletion and soil stress. "We ignored nature's cues and paid the price," he noted.

Distortive incentives compounded the problem. Subsidized electricity for groundwater pumping and heavy chemical fertilizer use encouraged overextraction and unsustainable practices, while support for organic inputs remained minimal. For decades, he argued, policymakers traded long-term sustainability for immediate production.

Today, however, global awareness is growing. Conversations have shifted, from local governments and informed citizens to the United Nations, toward food systems approaches and sustainability missions, yet Prof. Chand cautioned that recognition has not translated into results. Groundwater continues to decline, soil health remains fragile, and many sustainability efforts remain rhetorical.

He emphasized that sustainability's benefits are long-term and poorly priced by markets. Yet a window of opportunity exists. In countries like India, food production is growing faster than demand, creating space to trade some growth for sustainability without threatening food security.

Bringing even 20 percent of farmland under sustainable practices by 2030, he suggested, could absorb short-term yield impacts while strengthening long-term productivity.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

India's Rice–Groundwater Mismatch

In parts of northwest India, rice cultivation expanded into low-rainfall regions where the crop was historically absent. This shift was driven not by ecology, but by policy incentives.

What went wrong

Subsidized electricity made groundwater pumping cheap, while procurement and price support favored rice over less water-intensive crops. The result was widespread overextraction of groundwater, rising soil stress, and growing ecological fragility.

Why this matters

When incentives disconnect crops from natural resource limits, productivity gains become temporary and sustainability failures compound over time.

Example 2| Resource-intensive and output-driven model.

Success, he argued, requires integrating two knowledge systems:

1. Traditional practices: mixed cropping, water harvesting, green manuring, and other regenerative approaches.
2. Modern innovations: precision farming and technologies that improve resource efficiency.

He concluded: sustainability cannot rely on tradition or technology alone; it requires rethinking incentives and moving beyond growth as the sole measure of success.

02 Reforming Governance and Institutional Architecture to Enable Multisectoral Implementation

Strengthening Policy Design Through Political Hierarchy, Data Systems, and Local Inclusion

Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki highlighted three essential elements to strengthen public policy design and implementation in Africa.

1. Political Weight and High-Level Coordination: He noted that in most African countries, ministries of finance and planning dominate policy design. Agriculture, environment, and water ministries often rank lower in political hierarchy, limiting their influence. Real change requires active engagement from the head of government to ensure these sectors gain political weight and are fully integrated into strategic decisions. Without this, the political economy remains skewed, constraining transformation.
2. Data-Driven Feedback Loops: Strong systems to collect, manage, and analyze implementation data are essential. Implementation capacity depends on robust statistical capabilities within both central and sectoral institutions. Without reliable data, governments cannot monitor progress, adjust policies, or respond to emerging challenges effectively.
3. Local Inclusion and Bottom-Up Engagement: policies often fail when local institutions are excluded from design. Dr. Mayaki stressed that effective public policy must balance top-down planning with bottom-up engagement. Local institutions are critical for translating national strategies into actionable solutions on the ground.

He concluded that public policy must move from a few central actors to a genuinely multi-actor space where all relevant ministries and local institutions influence both design and implementation.

03 Applying the Water–Energy–Food–Environment Nexus to Align Policies and Reduce Cross-Sectoral Trade-Offs

Aligning Policies to Minimize Trade-Offs and Unlock Synergies

Building on sustainability challenges, Dr. Claudia Ringler illustrated how India exemplifies the tension between agricultural growth and natural resource sustainability. Many policies unintentionally pull in opposing directions, creating trade-offs that undermine long-term progress.

She emphasized the Water–Energy–Food–Environment (WEFE) nexus framework, which examines how interventions in water, energy, food, and environment interact. This approach identifies hidden trade-offs and potential synergies. For instance, India's biofuel policy increases energy independence but relies on water-intensive crops like sugarcane and rice. The nexus framework allows policymakers to assess impacts on water security, food supply, and environmental health. It also highlights opportunities, such as using sugarcane residues for biofuels or biogas, practices already emerging in Gujarat.

Dr. Ringler highlighted how nexus-based tools, such as CGIAR's nexus scorecard, foster collaboration across ministries and government levels. By systematically applying the WEFE approach, India could achieve better cross-sectoral coordination, prevent future resource losses, and unlock innovations for sustainable development.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Aligning Policies to Minimize Trade-Offs and Unlock Synergies

India's biofuel policy aims to strengthen energy security by promoting ethanol production from crops such as sugarcane and rice, supported through sector-specific incentives.

While effective for energy goals, the policy increased demand for water-intensive crops in regions already facing water stress. This placed additional pressure on groundwater and surface water systems, creating unintended trade-offs between energy, agriculture, and environmental sustainability.

Without assessing interactions across water, energy, food, and environment, well-intended policies can undermine long-term resilience. Applying the WEFE nexus helps policymakers identify trade-offs early and redesign interventions to protect natural resources while still meeting development objectives.

Example 3 | Aligning Policies to Minimize Trade-Offs

04 Science-Led Implementation: Embedding Evidence, Innovation, and Partnerships into Agricultural Policy

Science-based reforms, soil/water innovations, seed systems, institutional delivery

Dr. William Dar reaffirmed that science must guide policy, and policy must empower science. Drawing on the Philippines' experience between 2019 and 2022, he highlighted the Rice Tariffication Law, which stabilized rice prices through liberalized imports, demonstrating how evidence-based policy can achieve tangible outcomes.
He outlined three pillars of the 1DA Reform Agenda: modernization, industrialization, farm consolidation, and professionalization, all anchored in science. Key examples included:

1. Soil Health and Water Innovations: Digital soil mapping and nutrient diagnostics improved fertilizer use efficiency, reducing waste and enhancing productivity.
2. Village Model Applications: Participatory approaches inspired by ICRISAT integrated climate-smart seeds, water harvesting, and pest management. In Karnataka, the Kotapalli watershed model restored soil and water across 3.5 million hectares, boosting rainfed agriculture growth to 5 percent annually.
3. Science-Based Seed Systems: Hybrid rice and corn adoption expanded via performance-based certification and public-private partnerships, ensuring quality seeds reached even remote farmers.

Dr. Dar emphasized that success requires clear policy anchors, institutional collaboration, adequate funding, and rigorous monitoring. Science is not an add-on but the foundation of effective agricultural policy.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Science-Led Market Reform

The Rice Tariffication Law liberalized rice imports to stabilize prices and improve food affordability, replacing restrictive import controls with evidence-based market reform.

What changed
Rice prices stabilized, consumer access improved, and public resources were redirected toward productivity-enhancing investments rather than price distortion.

Why it matters
The reform shows how science-based policy, backed by clear institutional anchors, can deliver tangible outcomes when evidence guides decisions and implementation is aligned with market realities.

Example 4| Evidence-based policy reform grounded in market and price analysis

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Kotapalli Watershed Model, India

A community-led watershed programme integrating soil restoration, water harvesting, and climate-smart agriculture across rainfed regions.
Impact

The model restored soil and water systems across 3.5 million hectares and increased rainfed agriculture growth to 5 percent annually.

Why it matters
It shows how science-based solutions succeed when embedded in local institutions, farmer participation, and integrated delivery systems.

Example 5 | Science-led local delivery through community institutions

05 Designing Context-Specific, Incentive-Aligned Solutions to Overcome Last-Mile Failures

Fit-to-context, convergence, community-led action, redesigning incentives

Dr. Ramesh Chand began by noting that while much is said about well-designed policies, many are poorly designed and often doomed to fail. Even policies that are well-intentioned frequently do not deliver results on the ground. Drawing from eleven years in the Government of India's policy ecosystem, he reflected on why policies often fail at the last mile, particularly when navigating the interface of political economy, farmer livelihoods, and macroeconomic realities.

A central problem, he explained, is that most policies are crafted to address broad problems, declining water tables, soil degradation, shrinking biodiversity—through uniform solutions. Sustainability challenges, however, require context-specific, nuanced solutions tailored to local ecological and socioeconomic conditions. This lack of specificity is where many otherwise sound policies falter.

Dr. Chand shared several case-based insights:

1. Success Depends on Fit Between Solution and Local Context: He cited India's long-standing incentives for micro-irrigation and water harvesting. Outcomes varied widely: some regions succeeded remarkably, others saw little improvement. In one area with saline groundwater and infrequent canal irrigation, farmers were incentivized to set aside a fraction of land for on-farm ponds. By storing half canal water and half groundwater and using micro-irrigation instead of flood irrigation, farmers achieved excellent results. The key was that the intervention matched the local sustainability context.
2. Convergence Matters: Whole-Village Approaches Outperform Partial Interventions: In India's Climate-Resilient Agriculture programme across 3,000 villages, success depended on integrated interventions. Villages that adopted a complete solution—water harvesting, micro-irrigation, quality seeds, extension services, farmer training, and e-market linkages—showed strong results. Villages with only partial interventions performed poorly. The lesson: convergence of interventions is essential for complex sustainability outcomes.
3. Local Solutions, Community Ownership, and Committed External Actors Drive Transformation: Maharashtra's drought-prone Marathwada region. In Beed district, where droughts, groundwater scarcity, and farmer distress were common, local solutions implemented with strong community involvement and the leadership of a returning activist led to remarkable transformation.

Rainwater harvesting and rejuvenation of dry streams turned seasonal streams perennial, enabling farmers to shift from low-yield soybean and cotton to high-value horticulture. According to Tata Institute of Social Sciences, farmer incomes increased tenfold in seven years. Similar successes were reported in Andhra Pradesh, where communities aligned cropping patterns with rainfall forecasts to prevent groundwater depletion.

4. Distorted Incentives Must Be Redesigned, Not Removed: Subsidies such as free electricity or heavy chemical fertilizer support often undermine sustainability. Dr. Chand advocated for redesigning incentives rather than eliminating them. For example, metered electricity with direct cash transfers per acre reduced water-intensive paddy irrigations from 30 to 20 or fewer, improving both water and energy efficiency. Innovative incentive design is essential to align sustainability with farmer interests.
5. Policy Solutions Must Consider Livelihoods: Some sustainability reforms clash with existing livelihoods. If a policy threatens farmer income, implementation faces inevitable resistance. For instance, India's diversion of sugarcane for biofuel is complicated by low international prices, unlike maize, which has become an affordable biofuel feedstock due to improved yields. Such macroeconomic forces make policy choices more complex.

EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

Community-Led Transformation, Marathwada Region, Maharashtra

A drought-prone region marked by groundwater scarcity, crop failure, and farmer distress.

What worked
Community-led rainwater harvesting and rejuvenation of dry streams, supported by committed local leadership, turned seasonal streams perennial. Farmers shifted from low-yield crops to high-value horticulture, increasing incomes tenfold in seven years.

Why it matters
This case shows that sustainability accelerates when communities co-own solutions. Local leadership and social capital can transform ecological constraints into economic opportunity.

Example 6| Community-led water governance and incentive redesign enabling livelihood resilience
Picture Courtesy: Hindustan Times

Despite these challenges, Dr. Chand noted that numerous success stories across India show that growth and sustainability can be aligned through well-designed, context-specific policies backed by convergence, community involvement, redesigned incentives, and strong research and development.

> Sustainability does not emerge from blanket policies; it grows where solutions fit the land, the community, and the lives they lead."
> —Dr. Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog

06 Integrating Youth into Policy Design: Building Responsive Governance for a Young Demographic

Dr. Mayaki highlighted Africa's demographic imperative: with a median age of 19, governance systems must adapt to younger societies. Youth should be included from the start of policy design rather than consulted after plans are set.
He noted trends such as urban youth moving into rural areas for startups while rural youth seek urban opportunities. Effective governance must integrate youth aspirations and entrepreneurial energy to harness this dynamic for national development.

Closing Remarks

Ramona Angelescu Naqvi, Chief Operating Officer, WAF, concluded by emphasizing how the panel's global perspectives enriched the dialogue, blending conceptual frameworks with concrete examples from India, Africa, the Philippines, and Uzbekistan.
She highlighted key themes from the discussion: learning, measurement, impact, and livelihoods, while acknowledging persistent barriers to implementation. These include misaligned incentives, limited institutional capacity, insufficient leadership, misjudged priorities, inadequate financing, and the absence of the right stakeholders at the table.
She stressed the importance of including smallholder farmers, youth, and the private sector in policymaking processes and must be engaged, and empowered to contribute their insights.
She reinforced that science is not an add-on to policy; it is the foundation. Across the session, speakers repeatedly underscored the centrality of capacity, the ability to implement policies, measure progress, adapt to changing circumstances, and coordinate across ministries, agencies, and countries. Capacity and leadership are required not only at the national level but also within local governments, frontline agencies, and community institutions.
She noted that the strength of the dialogue was not a set of competing viewpoints, but a highly complementary set of perspectives, where institutional reform, science, incentives, finance, and community action reinforced rather than contradicted one another.

> The bridge between policy and practice is built not with strategy alone, but with collaboration, evidence, and sustained leadership."
> — Ramona Angelescu Naqvi, COO, WAF

Key Takeaways

Concepts have evolved faster than institutions.	Countries now speak the language of food systems, sustainability, and multisectorality, but core ministries still operate with older mandates and limited coordination. Until institutions reorganize around modern challenges, even strong strategies will stall.
Misaligned or outdated incentives remain a major barrier.	Subsidies for water, energy, and inputs often encourage depletion rather than regeneration. Without incentive redesign—rather than simply removal—policies intended to promote sustainability will continue to underperform.
Science must sit at the core of implementation, not only strategy.	Soil diagnostics, climate-resilient seeds, digital agronomy, and evidence-based extension need to be embedded directly into delivery systems. Science influences outcomes only when it informs everyday decisions at farm and district levels.
Local engagement and context-specific solutions drive real results.	Policies framed at national levels often fail because they overlook local conditions. When communities co-design solutions such as water harvesting or cropping choices, implementation improves and sustainability becomes practical rather than aspirational.
Data systems and feedback loops are essential for course correction.	Governments need reliable, timely data to adjust policies as conditions change. Without functioning national and sectoral statistical systems, implementation capacity weakens and mistakes repeat.
Sustainability requires a blend of traditional knowledge and modern science.	Older practices such as mixed cropping, water harvesting, and green manuring, when combined with precision technologies, offer pathways that are both productive and regenerative.
Youth inclusion must happen early in policy design.	Young people are shaping agricultural markets and technologies, yet they are usually consulted too late. Bringing youth into policy design from the beginning helps ensure relevance, innovation, and long-term adoption.

Conclusion

Sustainable agriculture stands at an inflection point, caught between the world we inherited and the world we urgently need to build. Our systems are not broken; they were designed for a past that no longer exists. Institutions shaped for the Green Revolution cannot govern the age of climate volatility. Incentives crafted for scarcity cannot respect ecological limits. Policies designed in capitals cannot flourish without the wisdom of villages. Science cannot remain in laboratories when the future is unfolding in fields.
Yet the dialogue offered rare optimism. Examples from India's drylands, the Philippines' rice markets, Africa's decentralization journeys, and community-led initiatives show that sustainability is not abstract, it is a lived reality where evidence, leadership, and citizen agency converge.

A new grammar for implementation emerges: leadership that coordinates, science that guides, incentives that align, communities that co-own, and data that learns. This is not aspiration; it is action. Beyond the insights shared, this dialogue reinforced the importance of neutral, independent, cross-sectoral platforms like the World Agriculture Forum (WAF) to create the conditions for honest reflection, shared learning, and practical collaboration. Such spaces are essential for shaping future policy programs, strengthening implementation, and fostering deeper collective engagement across the global agriculture and food systems community.

If the last fifty years were defined by producing more food, the next fifty must focus on producing it differently: fairer, cleaner, climate-resilient, and grounded in learning systems. The challenge for governments, research institutions, the private sector, and citizens is not to rewrite what we know but to reorganize how we act.

Sustainable agriculture is no longer just a technical agenda. It is a governance agenda, a cultural agenda, and above all, a collective agenda.

Annex I: Key Concepts and Frameworks Referenced

- Food Systems Approach
- Water–Energy–Food–Environment (WEFE) Nexus
- Science–Policy–Practice Continuum
- Climate-Resilient and Regenerative Agriculture
- Incentive Redesign and Political Economy of Reform
- Institutional Alignment and Governance Reform
- Context-Specific Policy Design
- Data Systems and Adaptive Feedback Loops

Annex II: Case References

- Africa: Institutional Disconnect in Agricultural Reform (CAADP)
- India: Groundwater, rice cultivation, and incentive reform
- Philippines: Rice Tariffication Law and science-led reform
- India: Biofuel Policy and WEFE Trade-Offs
- Kotapalli Watershed Model, India
- Marathwada Region, Maharashtra: Community-Led Transformation

Annex III

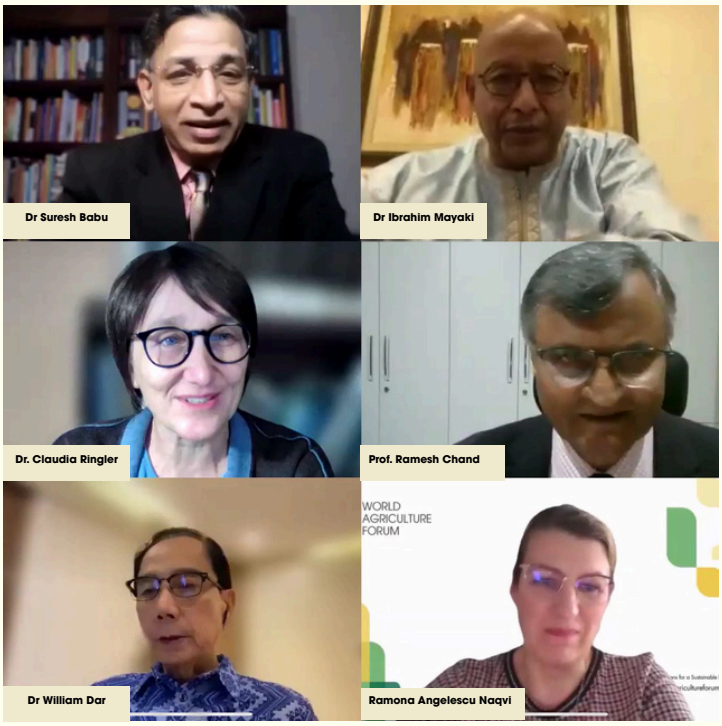
Speaker profiles

Moderator: Dr Suresh Babu, Emeritus Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

Panelists:

- Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, Former Prime Minister of Niger; Food Security Envoy, African Union (AU)
- Dr William Dar, Vice-Chair, World Agriculture Forum (WAF) Board; Former Secretary of Agriculture, Philippines; Former Director General, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)
- Dr. Claudia Ringler, Director, Natural Resources and Resilience (NRR), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
- Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog; Member, Integrated Partnership Board (IPB), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR); Member, Policy Advisory Council (PAC), Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)

Closing Remarks: Ramona Angelescu Naqvi, COO, World Agriculture Forum (WAF)



Recording Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrY9c7a9u_w&t=6s

WORLD AGRICULTURE FORUM

About the World Agriculture Forum (WAF)

The World Agriculture Forum is global platform connecting diverse stakeholders to drive sustainable agricultural development through policy advocacy, trade facilitation, and technology-driven solutions. WAF unites governments, farmers, agribusinesses, experts, and development institutions to bridge implementation gaps and drive sustainable agriculture and food systems transformation towards a resilient, food-secure future. With a strong focus on collaboration, innovation all along the value chain, and public-private partnerships, WAF is committed to transforming agriculture worldwide.