

Dear Madam/Sir,

We are pleased to read in the coalition agreement that this government pays attention to the root causes of poverty, migration, terror and climate change. This fits seamlessly with the international agreements concerning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although achieving the SDGs is primarily a responsibility of governments, we firmly share the belief that the goals will not be achieved without the contribution of the private sector. Companies are well positioned to help create a more inclusive and sustainable economy, one that works for all, within the means of our finite planet.

Companies, however, will not contribute to the SDGs at the scale and breath required without first seeing change in the current state of finance. There is a significant misalignment between the currently dominant short-term shareholder focus and the need to move to a more long-term focus that takes all stakeholders and their different needs into account.

We therefore suggest an even greater emphasis on *sustainable finance* within the context of the SDGs. In this context, the Business and Sustainable Development Commission (BSDC) published its flagship report *Better Business, Better World*. This outlines a number of actions which can advance sustainable finance, including a *Taskforce on Blended Finance* and the creation of *Global Goals League Tables*.

Building on the latter recommendation from the BSDC, Aviva, the UN Foundation and Index Initiative are working on establishing the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA). The goal of the WBA is to develop, house, and safeguard free, publicly available corporate sustainability benchmarks aligned with the SDGs. These benchmarks will help financial institutions and other stakeholders to exert their influence in improving corporate SDG performance, as well as provide a system that credits and rewards companies that lead on the SDGs, while creating accountability for those that continue to lag behind.

The WBA is currently endorsed by over 40 institutions, including some of the leading existing benchmarks in this space as well as leading financial institutions, such as ABP, ABN-AMRO, Aviva, Rabobank, Folksam, IFC, Nordea and Investec Asset Management.

In addition to corporate sustainability benchmarks, some of the index foundations, including the Access to Seeds Foundation and the Access to Nutrition Foundation, aim to (also) impact the role of small and medium enterprises in contributing to the SDGs. They develop regional and country indexes, as well as other accountability tools for national companies and sustainability stakeholders, including policy makers and NGOs.

We hope the Ministry for Foreign Affairs will continue to support sustainability benchmarks and an increased focus on sustainable finance in support of achieving the SDGs. We look forward to continuing our conversation and contributing in any way possible.

On behalf of the Access to Seeds Foundation, the Access to Nutrition Foundation, the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark and the World Benchmarking Alliance founding partners,

Your sincerely,

Gerbrand Haverkamp

Executive Director, Index Initiative Foundation
Contact: g.haverkamp@indexinitiative.org

About the Access to Nutrition Foundation

Malnutrition affects both the developing and developed world. To date, one in three people face at least one form of malnutrition and must deal with the health consequences of an inadequate diet. Not surprisingly, nutrition has become a global public health priority in the last few years, which is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); two of the 17 SDGs are directly linked to nutrition, while 12 of the 17 SDGs cannot be achieved without action on nutrition.

While much of the focus of development institutions, research bodies and funders has been placed on identifying the determinants of malnutrition, potential policy solutions and direct interventions, little focus has been placed thus far on assessing the role of the private sector in fighting malnutrition. The Access to Nutrition Foundation (ATNF) was established to address this gap. ATNF develops and publishes regular benchmarks of companies' contributions to improving diets and nutrition, in the form of indexes. Benchmarking of this nature both creates awareness and drives change. ATNF has published two editions of the Global Access to Nutrition Index to date, with a third index is due in May 2018. ATNF has also begun to publish country-specific Spotlight Access to Nutrition Indexes. The first India Index was launched in December 2016 and the first U.S. Index will be launched mid-2018.

About the Access to Seeds Foundation

The heart of the solution of SDG#2 Zero Hunger is supporting smallholder farmer productivity. Smallholder farmers produce 80% of all food consumed in Africa and Asia, regions where challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition are most pressing and where the lion's share of the projected growth of the global population will take place.

That is why donors like the European Union and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are investing over 500 million euros in the coming years to develop new technologies, tools and varieties that will help smallholder farmers to grow more, and more nutritious, food. Getting these solutions in the hands of farmers requires partnerships with the seed industry, as it is the core capacity of seed companies to develop and deliver new technologies to the farm gate with each growing season.

The Access to Seeds Foundation published the first Access to Seeds Index in 2016, highlighting the key role regional seed companies play in supporting smallholder productivity. Therefore, the second index, scheduled for 2019, will more than double the number of regional companies evaluated, active in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

The Access to Seeds Index has already resulted in new industry-wide and company-specific initiatives focused on companies' role in supporting smallholder farmer productivity; led to new partnerships between seed companies, public research institutes and civil society organizations and has informed new initiatives in this area by the World Bank, USAID and the African Union.

Corporate Human Rights Benchmark

The Corporate Human Rights Benchmark is a unique collaboration led by investors and civil society organisations dedicated to creating the first open and public benchmark of corporate human rights performance.

Corporate Human Rights Benchmark Ltd, is a not for profit company created to publish and promote the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark. The Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) was launched in 2013 as a multi-stakeholder initiative and draws on investor,

business and human rights, and benchmarking expertise from seven organisations: APG, Aviva Investors, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, EIRIS Foundation, Institute for Human Rights and Business, NORDEA Wealth Management, VBDO.

World Benchmarking Alliance

Aviva, the UN Foundation, BSDC, and Index Initiative are putting forward the idea of establishing a World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA). The vision for the WBA is that it becomes an institution that will develop, fund, house, and safeguard publicly available, free corporate sustainability benchmarks aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. By providing all stakeholders with access to this information, the WBA will help investors, civil society, governments and individuals exert their full influence and help the private sector play its role in delivering the SDGs. This environment of enhanced transparency and understanding can fundamentally change the quality of multi-stakeholder engagement and align corporate performance with sustainability objectives. Benchmarks and league tables are only powerful tools if they are considered robust, credible, and used by a large number of actors. Only through the formation of a genuine alliance can the WBA be effective as a global institution and develop high-quality benchmarks.

The WBA has started establishing a pipeline with 5 sustainability benchmarks, focusing on several topics and industries: climate action, gender equality, seafood stewardship, access to internet and the apparel industry.