



Food System
Economics
Commission

The Food System Economics Commission is an independent academic commission that equips political and economic decision makers with tools and evidence to shift food and land use systems.

POLICY BRIEF 6

Making food system governance more coherent and inclusive through new institutional arrangements

SUMMARY

Transforming food systems to ensure that they are inclusive, health-enhancing and environmentally sustainable requires new modes of governance. Conventional governance arrangements have proven inadequate to solve highly interconnected food system problems as they tend to produce fragmented policy solutions and/or exclude stakeholders with little lobbying power. This brief presents different approaches that highlight how governments can coordinate policy sectors and engage food systems actors more effectively.

BACKGROUND

To solve complex food system issues, better coordination of different policy areas and actors is needed.

Many urgent **food system issues are multi-faceted and systemic**: they involve economic, environmental, health, and social dimensions, and are complex and interlinked both in their causes and outcomes. For instance, livestock farming practices that result in the overuse of antibiotics in animal husbandry pose a threat to human health as they are contributing to antimicrobial resistance. Addressing this problem not only requires action in the agricultural and health sectors, but also in the environmental area - due to the pollution of waterways with antibiotic residues - and in trade, as imported produce will need to meet standards for antibiotic use.

A major challenge in tackling these kinds of problems is that they do not easily fit the institutional structures of governments, where departments often work in silos on individual policy areas. This can lead to **disconnected policy making, resulting in redundancy, gaps, and incoherence** (Parsons, 2021).

In addition, food systems are complex in terms of different stakeholder groups involved. Traditional policy spaces located at one level, or including only part of a value chain cannot provide the deliberation necessary to address all relevant issues and interests. Most importantly, **power imbalances among stakeholders** tend to tilt policy agendas towards the interest of larger and better organized groups, with the result that reforms that lead to diffused benefits and concentrated costs are hard to implement. For example, policies to reduce dependence from animal products in the global North, which are likely to be opposed by major meat exporting countries and global food processors face a lot of opposition despite large public health and environmental benefits.

KEY FACTS AND FINDINGS

A range of new governance mechanisms has emerged to coordinate policy actors and involve diverse stakeholders in food system policy.

The complexity of food system challenges requires governance mechanisms that improve policy coherence, i.e., that reduce trade-offs and foster synergies between policies. New 'spaces of deliberation' that increase transparency and stakeholder participation in policymaking are also needed. More inclusive forms of governance

can give voice to marginalized perspectives, facilitate a shared understanding of problems, help overcome resistance to change, and supplement state capacity.

Fostering coherence in policy making requires bringing together different policy actors and involving diverse stakeholder groups.

A variety of governance arrangements is possible, with different degrees of formality and different degree of involvement of actors outside government. This brief focuses on five such mechanisms along the spectrum from working within current institutional structures to introducing entirely new structures or processes.

1. Cross-government food-themed groups:

The creation of groups like committees or taskforces that temporarily bring together members of various government departments can be used to coordinate food policy activities and enhance policy coherence. These groups can either have a more narrow focus on solving a particular food system issue, or a broad focus on the whole food system.

2. Multistakeholder Advisory Groups:

Groups that coordinate input from the private sector, civil society, and/or science provide a connecting mechanism between policymakers and multiple food system stakeholders. Ideally, they are independently moderated, facilitate evidence-based deliberation, and are institutionalized by parliaments to create long-term legitimacy beyond electoral cycles. To overcome power imbalances, ensuring the participation of marginalized groups is vital, which might require additional empowerment of vulnerable stakeholders. It is also crucial to include farmers' organizations to help articulate a consensus across the oftentimes fragmented farmer community.

3. National food strategies:

National food strategies provide an overarching framework for decision-making and are a key mechanism for improving food policy coherence by addressing the whole system and linking all relevant policy objectives and activities. Ideally rooted in modelled long-term pathways, they usually go beyond the short-termism of electoral cycles. This longer-term perspective makes them a good instrument to guide systemic transitions (DeSchutter et al, 2020). Some governments have set up advisory groups as part of their food strategy development. Such stakeholder-led design of national food strategies needs careful steering of the process to avoid capture by leading interests.

4. **Dedicated Food Policy Bodies:**

Policy bodies that work on a permanent basis to coordinate activities, policies and evidence related to the food system may be located internally or independent from government. They can be used to connect inside and outside government stakeholders working on food system issues (Parsons, 2022). This mechanism has been key in coordinating other complex policy sectors, namely climate change. In the field of food policy, however, it is not widely used at the national level yet. By contrast, local-level Food Policy Councils (FPCs) at the municipal or regional level are much more common. They usually involve a wide range of stakeholders and work together to advise on integrated policy development and improve local food systems (Schiff et al, 2022). They are either created bottom-up by civil society, taking the form of non-profit organisations, or established top-down as public councils mandated by the local authorities (Siddiki et al, 2015).

5. **Legislative mechanisms enshrining food policy goals and implementation in law.**

Coordination mechanisms such as strategies or groups may not be robust enough for the longer-term actions and perspectives required to address the food system. Enshrining food policy goals and implementation in law addresses this problem by holding governments or different government departments accountable (Parsons, 2022).

Cross-cutting mechanisms can further strengthen coordination of food policy, e.g., joint mapping, monitoring & reporting, and shared implementation budgets & progress indicators.

To gain a better understanding of the current state of the food system and measure progress towards policy objectives **mapping, monitoring, and reporting** initiatives gather existing evidence and provide data. Often, this is part of the process of developing a national food policy.

When required to contribute to cross-cutting activities, government departments are likely to defend their budgets for existing activities. Individualised budgets can thus hinder policy integration. Similarly, individualised indicators may lead departments to prioritize their own, separate goals over broader governmental goals. The establishment of **shared budgets or indicators** can therefore further incentivise joint working across government departments (Parsons, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Examples of how countries have implemented these mechanisms show their potential for policy coherence and inclusiveness.

There are a number of examples of how countries have used these governance arrangements, ranging from long-established to newer cases. There is momentum for new governance approaches to food systems - from Scotland, which passed its ‘Good Food Nation Bill’ in 2022, to Sierra Leone, which launched its flagship program for an inclusive, resilient agricultural system ‘Feed Salone’ in 2023. This section provides a short description of some of them.¹

Brazil: governance framework for Food and Nutritional Security combines multi-stakeholder conferences, a national food policy council, and an inter-ministerial government body.

As early as the mid-2000s, Brazil introduced a governance framework for food that reflects a participatory, coordinated, and intersectoral approach to policymaking: the National System for Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN). It applies a broad understanding of the term “food and nutritional security” that includes rural development and health. Three interdependent governance arenas are at the heart of the framework. The National Conference for Food and Nutrition Security (CNSAN) takes place every four years and gathers delegates from regional food and nutrition security councils, including civil society public sector representatives, under the inclusion of vulnerable populations. During these conferences, national priorities for food and nutrition security are identified. These are then discussed in the second main arena: the National Council for Food Security (CONSEA), an advisory body that includes representatives from the federal government and from civil society and that facilitates communication between all organizations engaged with food security. The directives formulated by CONSEA inform the third governance arena of SISAN: the inter-ministerial Chamber for Food and Nutrition Security (CAISAN), a government body that includes representatives from 20 relevant ministries and turns the proposals of CONSEA into public policy. States and municipalities can join this governance framework by establishing their own councils and chambers (Sonnino et al, 2014).

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Ireland: new national food strategy developed by multi-stakeholder committee pioneers food system approach.

The new national strategy 'Food Vision 2030' was published in early 2021. Since 2000, the development of the Irish agri-food sector has been shaped by a series of stakeholder-led strategies, which set out policy principles to guide the government's decisions. Compared to previous strategies, however, the new 10-year strategy emphasizes sustainability and employs a food systems approach, acknowledging the interdependences between policies for climate, the environment, agriculture, health, and prosperity. The strategy is structured along four key objectives that reflect these interdependent policy dimensions. The stakeholder committee mandated by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to develop the new strategy consisted mainly of representatives from the Irish agri-food sector, complemented by academic experts on health and the environment. In addition, it was provided with input from various experts, and two public consultations were held. The representative of the environmental pillar withdrew from the stakeholder committee at a later stage of the development, which reflects the still polarised debate between agricultural and environmental interests in Ireland. Nevertheless, the new strategy represents a shift in direction towards a stronger contribution of the agri-food sector to climate and environmental targets.

Switzerland: a multi-stakeholder process initiated from outside the Government combined scientific and civil society perspectives to advise on food system transformation.

In 2022 and 2023, broad stakeholder dialogues on the future of food in Switzerland were held: a scientific Expert Panel worked in parallel to a Citizen Assembly to develop recommendations for the nation's approach to food and presented their findings at Switzerland's first national food system summit. The process was initiated by the 'Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Switzerland', and several Swiss Government agencies sponsored the work. While a clearer public mandate would have given it more legitimacy, starting this process from a civil society side made it more agile, and the fact that SDSN was perceived as a neutral 'broker' was a success factor.

The citizen assembly's members were selected to represent the overall population. Through participation in workshops, stakeholder dialogues, practical 'learning journeys', working groups, and discussions with experts from the scientific panel, they developed suggestions that supported the transition process envisioned by the Government. The participants of the interdisciplinary

scientific expert panel, which covered health & nutrition, environmental sciences, political and social sciences, agronomy, economics, and other areas, gathered scientific expertise, and discussed transformation pathways. The panel's suggestions were similar to those made by the citizen assembly but highlighted the urgency to transform the food system in a more ambitious and rapid way. They received much media attention and were controversially discussed. Informally, calls have been made within Parliament to incorporate them into policymaking - although there is no official mandate for this yet. The panel report also proposed the institutionalisation of a scientific expert panel and a permanent national food policy council to regularly advise the Government, which would ideally be mandated by Parliament.

Uganda: new inter-ministerial committee drives food system transformation through joint planning, monitoring, and reporting - drawing on previous cooperation experiences in other sectors.

The goal to transform the national food system is part of Uganda's latest national development plan. In 2022, the country launched its inter-ministerial National Food Systems Coordination Committee (NFSCC), which was set up to coordinate different sectors' contributions to such a transformation, prevent 'siloed' policymaking and reduce capacity bottlenecks. It is chaired by the Prime Minister's Office (who, by Ugandan law, has the responsibility to coordinate cross-sectoral policies) and includes representatives from the Ministries and agencies that cover agriculture, health, water and environment, gender, and local governments. The National Planning Authority, affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, co-chairs the group. The committee also engages with stakeholders, including farmers, youth leaders, academics, and private businesses. The NFSCC has undertaken strategic analyses to identify policy gaps and resource shortages, inform a transformation roadmap, and create an action plan that makes evidence-based policy recommendations. These elements are being complemented by a reporting mechanism and progress indicators. A success factor were the experiences from past cooperations on health policy, which provided lessons learned on the importance of joint planning, reporting, and continuous communication. Seeing positive results from earlier coordination also increased the Ministries' motivation to coordinate on food policy.