



BRIEF III

Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Developing a Shared Agenda

Key Messages

- In a multistakeholder approach to food systems policymaking, different stakeholders typically have diverging viewpoints, preferences, constraints, and objectives that can lead to conflict. Developing a shared agenda among stakeholders is a vitally important part of navigating these challenges and designing food systems policies that maximize shared benefits and minimize risks.
- Building a shared agenda should start with assembling evidence on the benefits and risks of the available policy options to identify areas where objectives align and mutual benefit can be achieved.
- In addition to looking at the benefits and risks of policies individually, policymakers should seek to formulate policies that reinforce rather than contradict one another to improve coherence across policies that affect the food system.
- Finally, it is important to anticipate and plan for conflicts among stakeholders. Stakeholders must be ready to address points of tension, continue their engagement in the face of conflict, and work to assess and resolve differences in their values in pursuit of the shared agenda.

Background and Purpose

A food systems approach to policymaking means designing policies to maximize benefits across a range of food system outcomes and managing the risks of unintended consequences. Adopting this integrated approach to policymaking requires building strong relationships and regularly engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. Brief II in this series, “[Managing Stakeholders and Identifying Policy Entry Points](#),” describes how to convene the relevant stakeholders. Different stakeholders are typically motivated by diverging objectives that need explicit management. Pursuing a food systems approach increases the potential for conflict as more stakeholders and ministries—and therefore more viewpoints, preferences, constraints, and potential entry points—become involved. So how is it possible to navigate the diversity of perspectives, interests, and potential conflicts that may arise among these stakeholders? How can policymakers develop a shared agenda for action?

This brief details how to use evidence to create awareness of the benefits and risks of relevant policy options. It shares tools and methods to guide policy decision-making, to help assess policy coherence, and to mitigate and manage conflict, should it arise. It is targeted to policymakers across all agencies and ministries whose policy responsibilities have the potential to influence diets and nutrition, such as food, agriculture, environment, health, transport, trade, education, and economic policy. Developing a shared agenda between these multiple stakeholders is a vitally important part of navigating challenges and conflicts and is key to designing food systems policies that maximize shared benefits and minimize risks.

Use Evidence to Understand the Benefits and Risks of Policies

Key to developing a shared agenda is understanding the full range of benefits and risks of the available policy options across the food system, going beyond the outcome of interest to any one policymaker to consider those of interest to the diversity of stakeholders. By becoming aware of potential benefits and risks, policymakers can learn what factors they

need to consider when designing policies and can gain a shared understanding of what can be achieved for mutual benefit. Cultivating this mutual benefit can generate greater support and increased resources for food systems policies by aligning the objectives and priorities of different stakeholders (for more information on aligned financing, see Brief IV in this series, “[Costing and Financing](#)”).

Assessing the potential benefits and risks of policy options on a particular issue involves the following steps:

- **Step 1:** Select a policy area that can impact the policy issue of interest. For example, if the policy issue is poor food safety, the policy areas of interest could include trade, transport, retailing, and so on.
- **Step 2:** Identify the interests, priorities, and policy objectives of all stakeholders that have been convened.
- **Step 3:** Conduct a review of existing evidence in academic and/or grey literature, and identify what studies say about how the policy areas identified in Step 1 influence the interests, priorities, and policy objectives identified in Step 2 (both positively and negatively). This review could include evidence from the global, regional, or country level, depending on relevance, context, and availability. It could also include existing health, environment, or gender impact assessments, which could point to social and environmental determinants of the different outcomes.¹ Several tools exist to guide stakeholders through this evidence-gathering and assessment step, including the following:
 - **Better Evaluation’s Rapid Evidence Assessment Toolkit:** The toolkit contains guidance on choosing the right methods for a rapid evidence assessment and provides templates and sources for the assessment.
 - **Rapid Reviews to Strengthen Health Policy and Systems: A Practical Guide:** This 2017 guide from the World Health Organization describes how to conduct a rapid review of health policies, including how to select relevant studies, engage policymakers within

the rapid review, and communicate the review's findings. Though focused on health systems, the steps in this guide can be adapted to policymakers using a food systems lens.

- **Step 4:** Use the evidence gathered in Step 3 to formulate a list of benefits and risks, recognizing that these may vary by context and that the ultimate impacts of the policy will depend on how it is designed and eventually implemented. This list can be informed and generated by consultations

among the stakeholders. The gathered evidence can then be used to develop and inform a shared agenda that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the risks by allowing policymakers to anticipate and plan for them in policy design and implementation.

A number of evidence reviews of policies relevant to food systems already exist and can provide inspiration and information for this work. Three examples are included below.

Examples of Evidence Reviews



“Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Evidence on Benefits and Risks of Five Policy Areas across the Food System”

The evidence review in this series examines evidence across five policy areas (cash and food transfer policies, food safety policies, road and transport policies, agricultural extension policies, and land tenure policies) and details the potential benefits and risks they may have for other food system outcomes. This review can serve as both an example of how to conduct an evidence review (see the annex of the evidence review) and a repository of existing evidence for policymakers interested in these five policy areas.



Making Better Policies for Food Systems

This 2021 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

examines the benefits and trade-offs of food systems policies by assessing (1) the actual performance of food systems around the world; (2) the role of policies; (3) how policymakers can design policies that are coherent across different food system dimensions, and (4) factors that often complicate efforts to achieve better policies and how to address them. This report is a strong resource for stakeholders focused on understanding the benefits and risks of food systems policies and ways to address them. It includes three case studies—on the seed sector, the ruminant livestock sector, and the processed food sector—with a review of synergies and trade-offs.



A realist synthesis of the evidence on policies for healthier food consumption in urban Africa

This synthesis by Andrew Booth et al. reviews the evidence across five policy areas: trade and foreign investment, health and nutrition claims and labels, composition standards for processed foods, unhealthy food marketing, and school food policy. The review includes a synthesis of the evidence and the role of stakeholders from Ghana and Kenya to help explain the complex interconnections between the five policy areas.

Identify Pathways Forward in the Policy Context

Next, policymakers need to make decisions about how to manage potential benefits and risks, and subsequent trade-offs and synergies, to find a shared agenda for a pathway forward. Two examples of tools to guide this decision-making and agenda-setting are included below.

Examples of Tools to Guide Decision-Making and Agenda-Setting



- **The Food Systems Approach in Practice:**

This approach from the [European Centre for Development Policy Management](#) helps policymakers describe and diagnose food systems to develop more coherent and effective interventions to transform them. It offers a way to navigate the complexity of food systems through four steps: (1) food systems analysis, (2) sustainability analysis, (3) political economy analysis, and (4) development of transformation pathways based on these analyses. These analyses help policymakers understand potential benefits and trade-offs and unveil the power, interests, and incentives motivating different actors. Stakeholder consultation is crucial to every step.



- **Multi-criteria approaches:**

Using multi-criteria approaches, like [Multi-criteria Mapping and Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis](#), can support more complex decision-making around policies. These methods allow decision-makers to list multiple dimensions and criteria and integrate them within a framework. In Uganda, Multi-criteria mapping helped align research options for improving nutrition status consistent with the country's development priorities.² Researchers interviewed 16 representatives from six different stakeholder groups to appraise six options for research on addressing malnutrition in Uganda (ecological nutrition, community nutrition interventions, nutritional epidemiology, behavioral nutrition, clinical/therapeutic nutrition, and molecular nutrition). The researchers categorized these options according to five features (cost-effectiveness, practical feasibility, impact, social acceptability, and research efficacy) and used multicriteria mapping software to prioritize the research options. The highest priorities, they found, were applied community nutrition, behavioral nutrition, and ecological nutrition.



Identify Opportunities for Greater Policy Coherence

In addition to looking at the benefits and risks of policies individually, policymakers should seek to improve coherence across policies that affect the food system. An incoherent portfolio of policies can create conflicts or contradictory outcomes that undermine the intended impacts of coexisting policies. In contrast, by creating new policies that reinforce one another, policymakers can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies and likely boost support for the shared, mutually beneficial agenda. To understand how food systems can be redesigned and to manage trade-offs, policymakers can assess the impacts of different food policies on each other, identifying disconnections and tensions as well as potential synergies and complementary measures.

Three examples of tools to help policymakers assess policy coherence are included below.

Examples of Tools to Help Policymakers Assess Policy Coherence



- **Policy Coherence in Food Systems:**

This brief from the City, University of London's Centre for Food Policy provides insight into the dimensions of policy coherence and methods that can be used to conduct the policy coherence analysis.



- **Framework for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD):**

The OECD's PCSD Framework provides guidance on how to analyze, apply, and track progress on policy coherence for sustainable development. It provides open-ended questions to enable policymakers to screen policies, organizational structures, and processes and to consider other factors that influence the achievement of sustainable development goals. The food security module helps users (1) consider how domestic policies influence the four key dimensions of food security; (2) identify policy interlinkages of relevance to food security (horizontal coherence); (3) reform or remove policies that create negative spillover effects; (4) ensure coherence of actions for food security at different levels of government (vertical coherence); (5) consider diverse sources of finance to improve food security and ensure complementarities, and (6) consider contextual factors and create conditions for ensuring global food security.



- **Guide to SDG Interactions:**

This guide from the International Science Council examines the interactions between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the goal and target levels to determine the extent to which they reinforce or conflict with each other. It looks at interactions between SDG 2¹ and other goals, gives examples of how these linkages take shape in several regions, and provides policy options to enhance positive interactions and reduce negative ones.

¹End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Anticipate, Mitigate, and Manage Conflict Among Diverse Stakeholders

While the approaches described above can help develop a shared agenda, conflicts are likely and will vary by country, stakeholder, and policy issue of interest. Methods to address them may be applicable across contexts.

- **Conflict management programs:** Building formal conflict management programs into large multisectoral projects can prevent and moderate conflict when it arises. The Trans-SEC project in Tanzania, which sought to improve food security in rural populations throughout the country, involved an extensive list of stakeholders, including local and national government officials and national and international researchers.³ Noting the high likelihood of conflict within this varied group, the management team integrated a conflict management program into the project design from the beginning and assigned a Coordination Unit specifically to develop and implement it. The project also stressed the importance of recognizing the power dynamics and underlying interests that drive potential conflict.
- **Addressing points of tension as they come up:** The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance in Canada promoted collaboration between several local governments and organizations with an interest in the food and farming economy and served as a platform for harmonized policy implementation. A case study of the Alliance noted two ways to effectively manage conflict.⁴ The first is to directly name and address a point of tension as it arises. This approach does not eliminate the tension, but it does create the space to identify the cause of the tension and openly explore a mutually agreeable way to address it.
- **Continued engagement:** The second method from the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance example is to ensure continued engagement among group members.⁵ This approach ensures that all members and ministries remain represented and can address any potential issues or conflicts of interest as soon as they arise and that the work of the stakeholder group can proceed.

The Alliance required each primary representative to name a deputy to stand in when the primary member could not attend and to name a replacement if an individual missed three consecutive meetings. Actions like this help maintain continuity among the group, build rapport, and maintain the multisectoral nature of the platform.

- **Assess and resolve value differences:** Conflicts or disagreements may also arise from stakeholders' diverging values, which can be difficult to resolve. Unlike a conflict involving interests, which may be solved by compensating one interest for another, values are often held more closely and are less susceptible to compromise, as they are often linked to one's identity or perception of self. A deliberative approach can help resolve these value differences by allowing participants to exchange views and argue in support of or against actions to ultimately build consensus or find compromises. This process requires balanced information across all stakeholders; space for those involved to reflect on information, arguments made, and preferences; and oversight by a neutral facilitator who can listen to deliberations and propose decisions to create meaningful and accepted outcomes. This deliberative approach was notably used in the Food Systems Dialogues held in the lead-up to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.⁶ Note: though helpful, this process can be time-consuming and resource-intensive.

By anticipating conflict and setting up ways of mitigating and managing it, stakeholders can increase the likelihood that policies will align coherently and that the food systems approach, with its potential to maximize benefits and minimize risks for food system outcomes, will be sustained.

TABLE 1**TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR CREATING A SHARED AGENDA**

TOOLS AND RESOURCES	DESCRIPTION
Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Evidence on Benefits and Risks of Five Policy Areas across the Food System	This review, produced as part of the suite of materials including this brief, aims to inform the process of taking a food systems approach to policymaking by illustrating that policies and associated means of implementation can be designed to maximize benefits and minimize risks for objectives across the food system. It includes an annex describing the methodology for conducting an evidence review.
Rapid Evidence Assessment Toolkit Better Evaluation	The toolkit contains guidance on choosing the right methods for a rapid evidence assessment and provides templates and sources for the assessment.
Rapid Reviews to Strengthen Health Policy and Systems: A Practical Guide World Health Organization	This 2017 resource guides stakeholders on how to conduct a rapid review of health policies, including how to perform a rapid review, select relevant studies, engage policymakers within the rapid review, and communicate the review's findings. Though focused on health systems, the steps in this guide can be adapted to policymakers taking a food systems lens.
The Food Systems Approach in Practice European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)	This is an iterative, step-based approach to help analyze and manage benefits and potential risks between various food systems policy objectives and policy options.
Multicriteria Mapping Tool	This tool supports decision-making on complex problems by developing criteria and assigning weights based on their relative importance.
Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) Tool Natural Resources Leadership Institute	This tool supports complex decision-making by integrating qualitative and quantitative outputs to prioritize options among alternatives. It helps groups consider their values and goals and consider trade-offs when making a decision.

Table 1 continued

<p>Policy Coherence in Food Systems City, University of London, Centre for Food Policy</p>	<p>This brief describes what policy coherence is, why it is needed, and how to analyze it to devise a more coherent food policy. It includes examples and dimensions of policy coherence.</p>
<p>Framework for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)</p>	<p>This report describes how to analyze, apply, and track progress on policy coherence for sustainable development.</p>
<p>Guide to SDG Interactions: From Science to Implementation International Science Council</p>	<p>This report proposes a seven-point scale to quantify synergies and conflicts among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is focused on four SDG goals: Zero Hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), affordable and clean energy (SDG7), and life below water (SDG14), as well as their interactions with other goals.</p>
<p>Conceptual Framework of the Factors Influencing Stakeholder Perceptions of Sustainability Goals J. Garcia-Gonzalez and H. Eakin, "What Can Be: Stakeholder Perspectives for a Sustainable Food System," <i>Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development</i> (2019).</p>	<p>This framework helps users map what is important to stakeholders, how they view the boundaries of the system, and what changes they feel are needed. It helps identify values, vision, and priorities for a multistakeholder initiative.</p>
<p>Mapping Potential Conflict Areas K. Löhr et al., "Conflict Management Programs in Trans-disciplinary Research Projects: The Case of a Food Security Project in Tanzania," <i>Food Security</i> 9, no. 6 (2017): 1189–1201.</p>	<p>This resource describes the Trans-SEC food security project in Tanzania and examines potential conflict in six areas: donor-funded, temporary, virtual, international, inter-organizational, and transdisciplinary. The resource includes a map of the project's organizational structure and identifies potential areas of conflict within it.</p>

Notes

¹World Health Organization, "Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Tools and Methods," <https://www.who.int/tools/health-impact-assessments>.

²D. Lubogo and C. Garimoi Orach, "Stakeholder Perceptions of Research Options to Improve Nutritional Status in Uganda," *BMC Nutrition* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–11, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303390464_Stakeholder_perceptions_of_research_options_to_improve_nutritional_status_in_Uganda.

³K. Löhr, C. Hochmuth, F. Graef, J. Wambura, and S. Sieber, "Conflict Management Programs in Trans-disciplinary Research Projects: The Case of a Food Security project in Tanzania," *Food Security* 9, no. 6 (2017): 1189–1201, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12571-016-0643-1.pdf>.

⁴IPES-Food (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems), *What Makes Urban Food Policy Happen? Insights from Five Case Studies* (2017), https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Cities_full.pdf.

⁵Ibid.

⁶For more information, see OECD's *Making Better Policy Choices for Food Systems* (Paris: OECD, 2021).



In this Series:

Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Evidence on Benefits and Risks of Five Policy Areas across the Food System

Brief I. Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: What, How, and Why

Brief II. Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Managing Stakeholders and Identifying Policy Entry Points



Brief III. Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Developing a Shared Agenda

Brief IV. Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: Costing and Financing

Full text of these documents is available here. [See Resources.](#)



Brief III was prepared by Ursula Trübswasser, Corinna Hawkes, Caroline Andridge, Natasha Ledlie, Augustin Flory and Albertha Nyaku.

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