



Taking a Food Systems Approach to Policymaking: A Resource for Policymakers

The Context

Food systems have enormous potential to support healthy diets and nutrition while also advancing livelihoods and prosperity and protecting the planet. Currently, however, food systems fail to deliver on this potential. Too often and for too many, our food systems yield hunger, malnutrition, poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

In 2021, the UN Food Systems Summit was called to address this missed opportunity. It sought to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by leveraging the many connections between food systems and global challenges, such as hunger, climate change, poverty, and inequality. By taking a food systems approach to policymaking, the Summit suggested, governments could harness the power of food systems to benefit people and the planet. But what does it mean to take a food systems approach? How can interested policymakers adopt this approach and apply it to their contexts?

The Resources

This package of resources—consisting of an **evidence review** and four **technical briefs**—is designed to address these questions. These resources define a food systems approach, explore potential entry points in different sectors, and present ways to identify and engage relevant stakeholders. Building on existing knowledge, frameworks and thinking, they provide pragmatic and practical ideas for how to operationalize a food systems approach holistically and effectively to achieve greater impact on food system outcomes. They provide country examples that illustrate real-world lessons and give links to existing tools and resources that policymakers can use to get started or to bolster ongoing efforts.

These resources have a particular focus on how a food systems approach can advance healthy diets and nutrition—but they can be applied to any food systems challenge. Indeed, because a food systems approach aims to maximize benefits and minimize risks for objectives across the food system, it fundamentally incorporates consideration of multiple outcomes.

The **evidence review** explores what policymakers should consider as they design policies—and associated means of implementation—to achieve multiple benefits across the food system. Drawing on existing studies, it provides examples of the impacts of policies and programs in five policy areas (cash and food transfers, food safety, road transport infrastructure, agricultural extension, and land tenure) on five food system outcomes (diets and food environments, agricultural production, livelihoods, gender equality, and environmental sustainability). These policy areas were selected because they represent a cross-section of sectors, government departments, and policy goals and because evidence is available on the impacts of these policy areas on the five outcomes considered. The examples presented show how a food systems approach helps identify both the potential benefits and risks of policy options and has implications for what actions might be needed to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

The four **technical briefs** aim to support policymakers on *how* to make policy decisions to shift the food system toward better outcomes. They convey practical information—not as prescriptions, but as ideas and options that can be adapted to the local challenges and opportunities faced by different countries. The technical briefs are based on existing evidence, case studies, and tools, and they offer resources and considerations for policymakers. They can be read sequentially as a set or as standalone briefs. Each begins with a summary of key points, and each recommends other resources that offer more in-depth information. The following table outlines the focus of each brief.

Brief Series:

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

Articulates what a food systems approach is and why it is valuable for policymakers

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

Explains how to take a more collective approach to policymaking by identifying the relevant stakeholders, using multistakeholder mechanisms to bring these stakeholders together, and identifying policy entry points for action

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

Shares tools and methods to guide policy decision-making, help assess policy coherence, and mitigate and manage conflicts

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

Discusses some of the cost and financing implications of a food systems approach

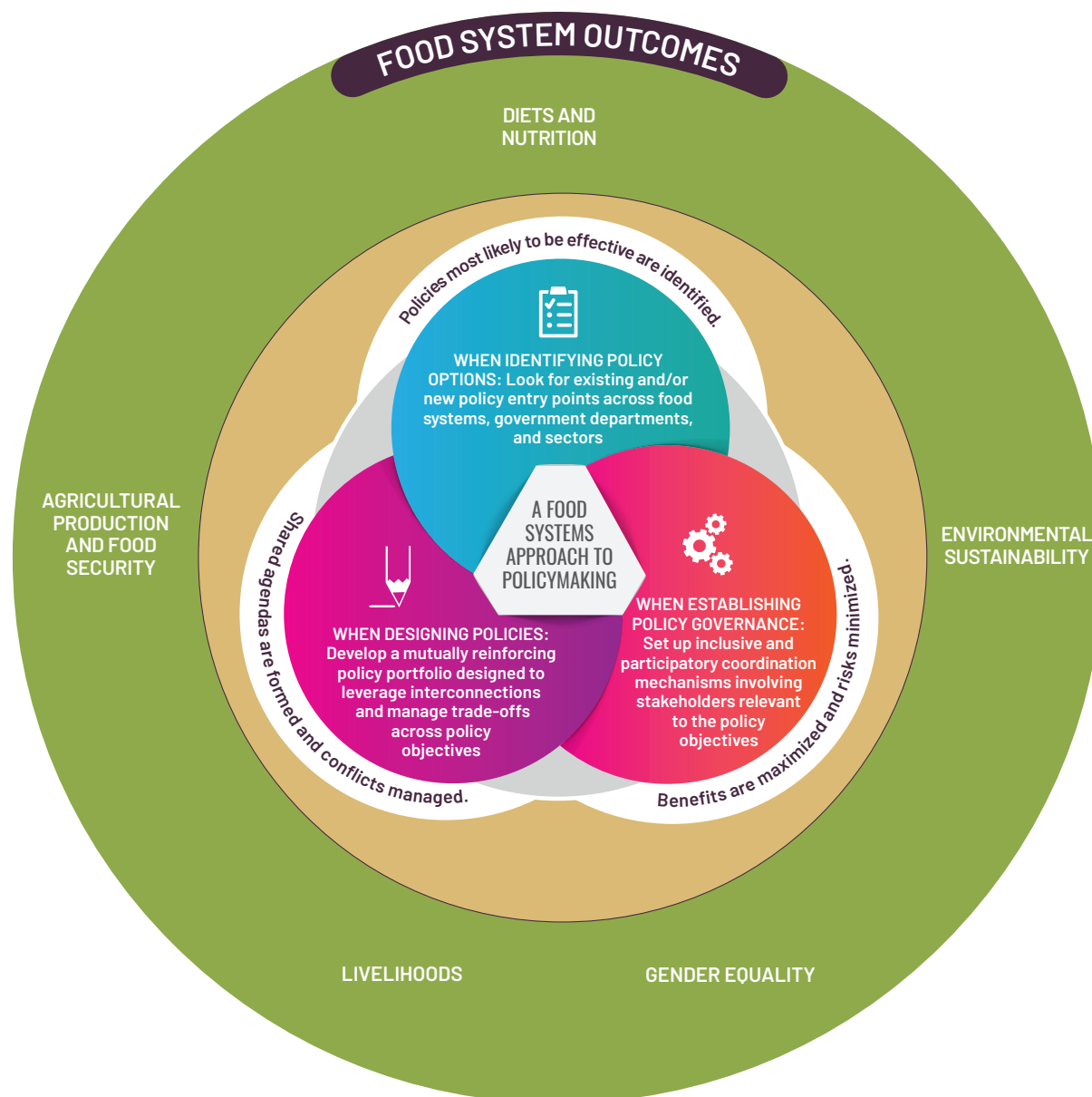


The Audience

These resources are targeted primarily to policymakers in government ministries and agencies with responsibility for *any policy* with the potential to influence diets and nutrition, such as policies on food, agriculture, the environment, health, transport, trade, education, and the economy. While the focus of the resources is on public policymaking and associated actions taken by governments, the *What, How, and Why* can also be applied to actions outside of government, as well as to food system challenges beyond healthy diets and nutrition. They can be used by advocates, funders, program managers, and any other stakeholders seeking to understand, encourage, and/or pursue a food systems approach to policymaking.

The Approach: A Sneak Peak

Taking a food systems approach to policymaking does not imply that all countries will follow a single pathway. Much depends on the policy issue and the context in question. So how can policymakers decide which policy or set of policies will work for their context, and how can they ensure that they are leveraging the benefits and managing the risks across multiple food system objectives? These resources approach these questions through a three-step iterative model.





WHEN IDENTIFYING POLICY OPTIONS

- **Look for existing and/or new policy entry points throughout food value chains, from inputs at the front end to waste and disposal at the consumer end.** Identify existing policies and programs that have potential to influence the policy objective while also seeking new entry points. For example, identify how current or new policies related to agriculture or food processing can be leveraged to improve people's diets. Identify either one entry point with the potential for positive ripple effects across the system, or multiple entry points that can enable coherent change across the system.
- **Look for existing and/or new policy entry points across government departments and sectors.** Identify relevant policies in different parts of government that could be leveraged to meet objectives. For example, incorporate nutritional elements into existing policies and programs primarily aimed at achieving economic development or climate objectives.



WHEN DESIGNING POLICIES

- **Consider how policy instruments designed to achieve one objective might interconnect with other objectives.** For example, how could policy instruments designed to achieve healthier diets benefit environmental sustainability? Is the policy instrument undermined or supported by other policies designed to achieve other objectives? How might the policy instrument create risks for other objectives? Engage with other sectors and stakeholders to limit incoherence between policies and to manage trade-offs between benefits and risks.
- **Combine policies into mutually reinforcing portfolios to align the system toward desired benefits while minimizing risks and managing trade-offs between objectives.** For example, a portfolio of policies and programs could be designed to support the economic benefits of agricultural production, food distribution networks and food markets in ways that synergise with healthier diets.



WHEN ESTABLISHING POLICY GOVERNANCE

- **Involve stakeholders from different parts of food value chains and from different sectors across the food system.** Include stakeholders who can influence policy objectives and whose interests might be affected by a policy positively (benefits) or negatively (risks). Clarify their roles and responsibilities in effecting change.
- **Develop inclusive coordination mechanisms to bring together the different stakeholders and sectors in a more coherent approach.** For example, draw on an existing nutrition coordination mechanism, or bring together a participatory mechanism specific to the purpose. Establish a common purpose and shared agenda and set up mechanisms for managing conflict.

Throughout each step, policymakers should consider the cost and financing dimensions of taking a food systems approach. Ideally, policymakers should plan for policy governance and decision-making costs to ensure country ownership as well as the credibility, accountability, and sustainability of the policymaking process. Policymakers may also be able to pursue financing opportunities that arise from taking a food systems approach. These could include more aligned financing or co-financing between government sectors and development partners, greater political visibility and support from influential champions, gender-equitable financing, and better incentives for private sector investment in the food system.

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INSTITUTION	ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER(S)
Ghana Ministry of Food and Agriculture	Paulina Addy
Nigeria National Home Grown School Feeding Programme	Abimbola Adesanmi
International Development Research Centre	Madiha Ahmed
CARICOM Caribbean Community	Shaun Baough
United States Agency for International Development	Rebecca Egan
UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office	Doreen Hashemi
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Kedar Mankad
Zambia National Food and Nutrition Commission	Musonda Mofu
Root Capital	Katie Naeve
Brazil Ministry of Health	Eduardo Augusto Fernandes Nilson
Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition	Obey Assery Nkya
University of Chile	Lorena Rodríguez Osiac
C40 Cities, Kenya	Stephen Otieno
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Ahmed Raza

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