Advantages, challenges, and implications of a food systems approach

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16 January 2024
Many Views on Food Systems and Transformation

Food System Wheel

Source: FAO (2018)

Food Systems 2030

Source: World Bank (2021)

Food System Transformation Framework

Source: Gaupp et al. (2021) of Food System Economic Commission
Advantages of Food System Lens

- Reflects inter-subjective lived experience of many individuals, households, and communities

- Traverses rural-to-urban continuum, multiple entry points for policy change and broader set of partners

- Facilitates coalition building to **overcome political economy obstacles**, drawing on wider repertoire of framings

- Elevates attention to **processes of inclusion and accountability** as well as outcomes
Challenges of Food System Lens

- Expands the constellation of relevant economic interest groups, **obscures winners and losers from reforms**

- Societal expectations of food system are **more expansive**
  - Food systems are a lens for power struggles over racial justice, gender equality, sovereignty, and human rights

- **Territorial externalities are unclear**
  - Cross-border impacts on food systems (e.g. EU Farm to Fork strategy on South African farmers, US Inflation Reduction Act)
Challenges of Food Systems Lens

- Lacks clear policy home
  - UNFSS Food System Transformation pathways were largely aggregation of sector-oriented strategies and policies
  - Convenors for pathways dialogues and implementation predominantly from Ministries of Agriculture

### Ministry/Department Convening National Food System Pathways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry/Department</th>
<th>Convenings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Ministry</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; Food Security</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President, VP, or Prime Ministers' Office</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Finance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy &amp; Development</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Affairs, Family, &amp; Gender</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Institute</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Calculated from FAO UN Food System Hub
Cannot Escape Trade-offs and Prioritization

Across goals
Better health in South Africa…. Or sufficient jobs?

Over time
Repurposing subsidies for ag R&D

Between process & outcomes
Confrontational in India & Netherlands

Consultative approach for Ireland’s Food Vision 2030

Source: M. Gautam et al. 2022. World Bank & IFPRI.
Implications for the CGIAR

- Even more complex!
  - CGIAR is about *agri*-food systems *and* land and water systems

- Lack a unified theory of change about how food systems change occurs and the piece of the puzzle that each research initiative informs

- More than 30 research initiatives but *still siloed* into different technical, regional, and/or methodological areas of competence
  - No assessment of coherence across initiative policy recommendations vis-à-vis the five main impact areas

- Opportunity to look at public sector institutional models, socio-political factors, participatory approaches that are more (less) promising for advancing innovation uptake
  - Role for advancing global governance mechanisms for food systems