



Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems

Results from Benin



Food systems policy coherence is the alignment of policies that affect the food system with the aim of achieving health, environmental, social, and economic goals, to ensure that policies designed to improve one food system outcome do not undermine others and, where possible, take advantage of synergies across policy areas to achieve better outcomes for all¹.

The Food Systems Policy Coherence Diagnostic Tool offers a practical methodology to assess food systems policy coherence and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing it. It was applied to Benin in 2025 via an extensive document review and expert consultations.

Structures & Mechanisms

The first module of the tool examines whether there are structures and mechanisms in place that would increase the likelihood of achieving policy

coherence. The results for Benin, shown below, indicate that Benin's food system policy community has taken steps toward transformation in terms of beginning work on the framework documents to guide food system transformation, but that there are areas to strengthen, particularly in terms of capacity and implementation, inclusivity and stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and accountability. As Benin is currently developing its Food Systems Strategy, some of the existing weaknesses are likely to be addressed through that process.

1. Adapted from Parsons & Hawkes. 2019. Policy Coherence in Food Systems.

Benin's Structures and Mechanisms in Support of Food System Policy Coherence

| Domain | Analysis and Recommendations |
|--|---|
| Framework Documents | Benin did not submit a formal pathway document at the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), but since then it has developed a preliminary report ² , which was used as the basis of this analysis. The report was developed through the involvement of diverse stakeholders and provides a strong starting point but could be strengthened through a more specific vision , a more integrated approach to the food system, and clearer priorities for change, accompanied by targets . The development of a more holistic food systems pathway is in course and should be followed through to provide a more complete vision. |
| Political Commitment | Benin's senior leadership has publicly supported a food systems approach through the Vice President providing a statement at UNFSS, demonstrating high-level political commitment. Once the food systems pathway is developed, it would benefit from high-level endorsement. More could also be done to ensure a sustained commitment to a food systems approach beyond electoral cycles or government terms. |
| Capacity & Implementation | As Benin finalises its food system pathway, it could strengthen several areas of capacity and implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally adopting or ratifying the pathway to bring it into mainstream policy, which could strengthen the likelihood of implementation, and ensuring its priorities are reflected in existing national policies • Developing a more comprehensive action plan for pathway implementation. • Developing and endorsing a comprehensive costed investment plan or budget for pathway implementation. • Expanding existing efforts at capacity building on food systems to a broader set of sectors within government. |
| Coordination Structures | Benin has a lead institution responsible for food system transformation, the National Food and Nutrition Agency (ANAN), and an ongoing national-level platform for coordination on food systems topics. There is also a forum to engage municipalities on food system topics, promoting coherence between national- and local-level policies. The country might benefit from designating champions or advocates for food systems transformation, embedded within different government departments. |
| Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement & Voice | While the abovementioned preliminary document is the result of inclusive dialogues, stakeholders might consider putting in place mechanisms for consulting technical/scientific experts on food system policies that cut across different sectors. |
| Monitoring & Accountability | Benin has in place some methods/tools for assessing potential policy impacts and is working to build public service capacity to collect and analyse evidence on policy impacts; both of these can help to ensure policies do not have unintended adverse consequences. In the future, stakeholders could consider strengthening monitoring and accountability by developing key performance indicators to support the forthcoming national food systems strategy, along with reporting milestones, mechanisms , and responsibilities aligned to the strategy. It will then be essential to ensure that results of monitoring those indicators are publicly shared. |
| Note: Green shading indicates domains where systems are highly supportive of coherence; yellow where they are moderately highly supportive; orange where they are only somewhat supportive, and red where they are generally not supportive | |

2. Rapport du dialogue national sur la transformation des systèmes alimentaires au Bénin: Pistes prioritaires. October 2024.

Policy Conflicts & Synergies

Module 2 considers the conflicts and synergies between existing policies across six sectors (shown in the columns of the table below) and the achievement of key goals of food system transformation, drawn from the United Nations Food Systems Summit process and shown in the rows of the table below.

Results for Benin are shown in the shading of each cell in the table, following the legend shown below the table. For example, the dark green shading in the first cell indicates that agriculture policies reviewed are highly coherent with (supportive of) the goal of increasing the supply of main staple crops, which contributes to achieving zero hunger. In contrast, environmental policies are shown to be highly incoherent with the goal of achieving adequate wages for food system workers.

Coherence between Benin's Policies and Key Food System Goals

| | | Agriculture | Health | Environment | Trade | Social | Industrial, Economic & Monetary |
|--|---|-----------------|-------------------|--|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Zero Hunger | Increased supply of main staples | | | | | | |
| | Affordable prices for main staples | | | | | | |
| Climate Resilience | Adaptation | | | | | | |
| | Climate change mitigation | | | | | | |
| Healthy Diets | More nutritious food consumption | | | | | | |
| | Less unhealthy food consumption | | | | | | |
| | Reduction of Food Loss & Waste | | | | | | |
| Decent Work | Adequate wages for food system workers | | | | | | |
| | Effective nutrition-sensitive social protection | | | | | | |
| | Empowerment of Women & Girls | | | | | | |
| LEGEND | | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Somewhat incoherent | Highly incoherent | Not assessed |
| Policies reviewed in this sector were very much in line with achieving this goal | | | | Policies reviewed in this sector were generally not in line with achieving this goal | | | |



Encouragingly, many policy areas were found to be highly coherent with most food systems goals. This was particularly true for trade and social policies.



For example, **social policies** help reduce hunger through social protection policies targeting poor rural households, constitutional recognition of the Right to Food, and food subsidies or transfers for the most vulnerable households. They support decent work through providing access to social security and requiring compensation in the event of workplace injuries.



Trade policies support climate and disaster resilience by including environmental sustainability clauses in trade agreements, ratifying agreements that support cooperation on climate change adaptation, and extending climate-related subsidies to exporting firms. They help reduce food loss and waste by putting in place measures to reduce loss during import and export, high-

quality trade facilitation measures, and trade-facilitating agreements that aim to expedite movement and clearance of goods along supply chains. They could do more to support healthy diets by lowering tariffs on imported nutritious foods and increasing requirements for labelling of imported foods.



More incoherence was found for other policy areas. For example, **health policies** support consumption of healthy diets through public campaigns to promote healthy eating and mandatory fortification of staple foods. They could do more by including mandatory nutrition labels on foods, particularly 'front of pack' labels; by regulating food advertising; and by enacting mandatory standards for food served in schools. They support women's empowerment by enabling access to contraception and providing free or subsidised maternal and child healthcare, but they could do more by ensuring access to gender-sensitive health services.



Agricultural policies are largely coherent with hunger reduction goals, such as by supporting production of main staple

crops via extension services, subsidised inputs, irrigation provision, and research and development. They support climate change adaptation through research and development of climate-resilient crops and livestock breeds, encouraging the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, and supporting crop diversification. While they are coherent with women's empowerment in terms of supporting women farmers' access to information and inputs, they could do more by strengthening women farmers' access to financial services and developing agricultural technologies specially adapted to women farmers' needs.



Environmental policies are largely coherent with climate change resilience, such as through supporting soil conservation

and reforestation, providing early warning systems for natural disasters, increasing renewable energy use, and restoring freshwater ecosystems. They could do more by considering stronger efforts to improve water use efficiency in irrigation and adding

temporary grazing exclusion measures for vulnerable grasslands. They support healthy diets by not restricting use of land for urban and peri-urban agriculture, which can help enable city dwellers to cultivate home gardens for nutritious produce, and supporting the use of agroforestry and wild-harvested foods. But they could do more to reduce consumption of unhealthy foods by limiting the use of single-use plastics for food packaging, as these types of packaging often advantage highly processed, less healthy foods over healthier alternatives.



Industrial, economic, and monetary policies support hunger reduction by recognising agriculture as an important

sector for economic growth, supporting the development of rural infrastructure, providing incentives for staple crop production, and limiting excessive pricing associated with anticompetitive behaviour. They support decent work through minimum wage laws, enabling collaboration with international agencies in food aid programmes, and providing for national food reserves / buffer stocks but could do more by ensuring food system workers are compensated with living wages.



Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, this application was conducted at the national level. Potentially relevant department-level policies and initiatives thus are not reflected, which may under- or overestimate the level of coherence. Second, policy is complex and dynamic, and the goals of food system transformation are numerous; this analysis considers only a limited number of food systems goals and policies at one point in time. In addition, is not necessarily the case that areas of incoherence in policies should be seen as 'bad'; there are some cases where incoherence may make sense, such as due to prioritisation across goals or political economy necessities.

Still, policy incoherence can sometimes lead to inefficiency and lower likelihood of achieving policy goals, as well as missed opportunities for leveraging synergies across policy areas where they exist. While achieving perfect coherence among all food-related policies across all outcomes is unlikely—and potentially undesirable, given the costs associated with coordination and alignment—by identifying and managing critical synergies and trade-offs, Benin's government and the stakeholders who support it can better align efforts towards achieving key goals.





You can access the tool and supporting resources here:



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