# Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems

## Results from Ethiopia

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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 all[1].

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 Ethiopia 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 Ethiopia, shown below, indicate that Ethiopia's food system policy landscape is generally very strong when it comes to supporting potential policy coherence. It has framework documents to guide food system transformation, backed up by political commitment, coordination structures, and monitoring systems, with steps toward implementation.

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

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

| Domain | Analysis and Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Framework Documents** | Ethiopia has a food systems pathway document submitted through the UNFSS, which was developed with broad stakeholder input and covers a wide set of food system domains and contains a vision for the future, alongside objectives, targets, and measures for including them. This creates a strong foundation for their food system transformation process. |
| **Political Commitment** | At the 2021 UNFSS, Ethiopia's food systems pathway was endorsed by H.E. Ato Oumer Hussein, then Minister of Agriculture. H.E. Dr. Lia Tadesse, then Minister of Health, also played a key role in emphasising the integration of nutrition and health in the transformation agenda. Their leadership, supported by others in the Ethiopian government and development partners, reflects a high-level political commitment to food systems transformation. |
| **Capacity & Implementation** | Pathway implementation is supported by formal adoption/ratification, the creation of a supporting action plan, linkages with existing national policies and strategies, and a costed road map. Capacity building of government staff on food systems approaches is also in course. |
| **Coordination Structures** | Coordination is led by the Ethiopian Food Systems Transformation and Nutrition Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Ministries of Agriculture and Health. The Food System and Nutrition Secretariat, housed within the Agricultural Transformation Agency, is the central coordination unit. Additional national platforms facilitate discussion among sectors on food systems topics, such as the Rural Economic Development and Food Security Sector Working Group, and there are food systems champions within government who advocate for a food systems approach.<br>While there are some mechanisms in place to engage different levels of government (e.g., local and regional), these could be strengthened to support vertical coherence in policies among levels of government. |
| **Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement & Voice** | Inclusivity and stakeholder engagement in food systems transformation in Ethiopia was supported by diverse dialogues in the run-up to the UNFSS (informing the development of the pathway), mechanisms for expert consultation on food systems policies, and including the voices of non-technical, non-government stakeholders in policy decision-making. More can be done in the future to work on broader, stakeholder engagement. |
| **Monitoring & Accountability** | Ethiopia's pathway is supported by key performance indicators, milestones, responsibilities and mechanisms for reporting, approaches for assessing cross-sectoral impacts of policies. However, to date there has not been comprehensive public reporting on progress using those indicators. While the pathway is subject to review and revision, the period for this is not clearly specified; accountability could be strengthened by specifying this. |

**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

# 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 Ethiopia 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 (supporting of) the goal of increasing the supply of main staple crops, which contributes to achieving zero hunger. In contrast, trade policies are shown to be somewhat incoherent with the goal of decreasing consumption of unhealthy food to contribute to healthy diets for all.

## Coherence between Ethiopia's Policies and Key Food System Goals

| | | Agriculture | Health | Environment | Trade | Social | Industrial, Economic & Monetary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Zero Hunger** | Increased supply of main staples | Highly Coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat incoherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat coherent |
| | Affordable prices for main staples | Somewhat coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat incoherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat coherent |
| **Climate Resilience** | Adaptation | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent | Highly Coherent | Highly Coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent |
| | Climate change mitigation | Somewhat incoherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Highly Coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Somewhat coherent |
| **Healthy Diets** | More nutritious food consumption | Somewhat coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat incoherent | Highly incoherent | Somewhat coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent |
| | Less unhealthy food consumption | Somewhat incoherent | Somewhat coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Somewhat incoherent | Somewhat incoherent | Somewhat incoherent |
| | Reduction of Food Loss & Waste | Somewhat coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat incoherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Highly Coherent |
| **Decent Work** | Adequate wages for food system workers | Somewhat coherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Neither coherent nor incoherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat incoherent |
| | Effective nutrition-sensitive social protection | Not assessed | Highly Coherent | Highly Coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent | Somewhat coherent |
| | Empowerment of Women & Girls | Highly Coherent | Somewhat incoherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat coherent | Highly Coherent | Somewhat incoherent |

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

All policy areas examined showed areas of coherence and incoherence, depending on the food systems goal being considered.

For example, **agriculture policies** are generally supportive of goals of reducing hunger, such as by supporting research and extension on main staple crops, and of women's empowerment, such as by aiming to specifically increase women farmers' access to inputs and agricultural information services. They may have some conflicts with climate change mitigation, such as by increasing agricultural mechanisation without accompanying this with strong efforts to mitigate the resulting greenhouse gas emissions or by supporting increases in ruminant livestock production.

**Health policies** were coherent of most goals related to hunger reduction and healthy diets for all, such as by providing health extension services in rural areas, fortifying staple foods with micronutrients, and supporting public information campaigns on healthy eating. However, they are not as coherent as they could be with climate change mitigation goals, as they do not actively promote demand-side dietary shifts towards lower-emissions foods, or with women's empowerment goals, as they do not have strong support for gender-sensitive health services or engaging with men (as well as women) on family and child nutrition topics.

**Environmental policies** also showed some areas of coherence, such as with climate change mitigation and adaptation goals through support to early warning systems, sustainable land management practices, and use of renewable energy for irrigation. However, some environmental policies might have conflicts with goals of achieving healthier diets if they limit access to fruits and vegetables (due to limits on water use for their production) or fish (due to fishing restrictions intended to increase fishery sustainability). While these exist for important environmental reasons, it is important to ensure mitigating measures are in place to prevent adverse impacts on diet quality.

**Trade policies** were the policy domain with the highest level of incoherence. For example, tariffs on imports of staple crops and agricultural inputs, as well as related non-tariff barriers, could lead to higher prices for staples, hindering efforts to achieve Zero Hunger. Similarly, import barriers related to highly nutritious foods (like fresh fruits and vegetables) could limit achievement of more nutritious food consumption—while a lack of restrictions specifically on foods high in salt, sugar, and fat could encourage more unhealthy food consumption, both undermining achievement of healthy diets for all. However, there were also areas of coherence, such as ratification of trade agreements that include cooperation on climate change adaptation

**Social policies** are overall coherent with many food systems goals, such as by helping reduce hunger through social protection policies targeting poor rural households and supporting climate change adaptation by including drought-tolerant seeds among the Productive Safety Net Programme, which provides subsidised agricultural inputs. Their coherence with the goal of healthy diets could be strengthened by supporting provision of healthy foods in workplace canteens and instituting a minimum wage sufficiently above the cost of a healthy diet.

**Industrial, economic, and monetary policies** are largely coherent with the zero hunger and climate change resilience goals, such as by highlighting the importance of agriculture as a sector for green economic growth, supporting rural and last-mile infrastructure, and including financial incentives for adopting climate-smart agriculture. They could do more to support decent work through minimum and living wages for food system workers. Women's empowerment could be better supported by, for example, strengthening efforts to improve women's financial inclusion, prohibiting gender-based discrimination in lending, and providing incentives to support women-owned food system businesses.

## Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, this application was conducted at the national level only. Relevant state-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, Ethiopia'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: