



MONITORING FOOD SYSTEMS in Cambodia

KEY MESSAGES

- Cambodia has emerged as a regional leader in food systems transformation, but fragmented monitoring systems are hindering implementation, weakening accountability, and restricting access to climate and development financing.
- Despite strong national data systems, challenges for the integration, prioritisation, and effective use of data and critical data gaps, particularly in food environments, value chains, climate, and governance, prevent Cambodia from linking production, markets, diets, and health outcomes, reducing the usefulness of data to inform policy, planning, and resource allocation nationally.
- Sub-national monitoring is particularly important in Cambodia given substantial geographic disparities in nutrition, poverty, climate vulnerability, and market access.
- Establishing a unified, nationally owned monitoring system, led by the Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) and anchored in the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), can help move from measurement to decision-making and action.
- A phased, policy-driven approach can enable Cambodia to rapidly operationalise a core indicator set, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and progressively close critical data gaps.

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Food Systems
Countdown
Initiative



gain
Global Alliance for
Improved Nutrition



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



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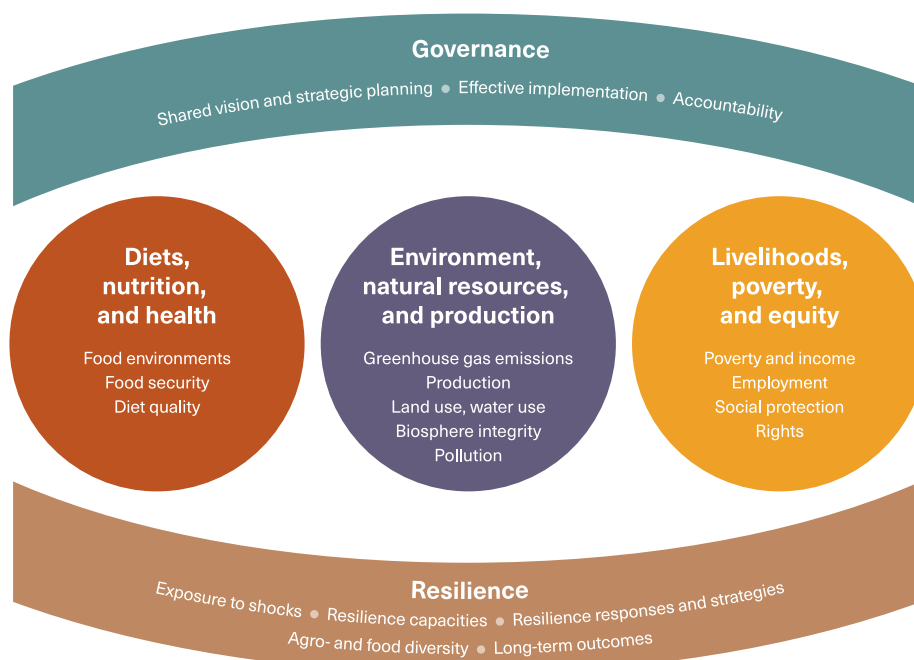
Introduction

Cambodia's food system is characterised by strong aggregate production alongside persistent challenges in food access and nutrition outcomes. The country produces a substantial surplus of staple foods, particularly rice, with annual paddy production of around 15 million tonnes and a surplus exceeding nine million tonnes available for export. The agriculture sector employs over three million people and contributes around 16% of GDP, with expanding production across rice, cassava, cashew, horticulture, and fisheries ^{1,2}. The 2023 Agricultural Census identified 1.85 million agricultural holdings across 3.2 million hectares, reflecting the scale of the rural production base and the importance of smallholder systems ³. Agricultural land expanded further to 4.43 million hectares in 2024, driven by both rice intensification and diversification into non-rice crops¹. Cambodia has also invested in value chains, including rice milling, cashew processing, and aquaculture, yet structural constraints remain with around 67% of rice exported as unprocessed paddy, limiting value capture and export earnings ⁴. While total agricultural exports have grown, reaching close to USD 4 billion in 2025 for key commodities, the country continues to rely on imports of higher-value and processed foods, indicating an ongoing trade imbalance in agri-food systems ^{5,6}. Importantly, regional tensions and climate-related shocks, including floods and droughts, continue to affect agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, and food security ⁴. National data show that 22%

of children under five are stunted and around 10% are wasted, while approximately 16% of households cannot afford a nutritious diet, reflecting persistent inequalities in access to diverse and healthy foods ^{7,8}. Cambodia is navigating a triple burden of malnutrition, with continued undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, alongside rising overweight and obesity and non-communicable diseases linked to changing food environments.

Cambodia has entered a decisive phase of food systems transformation. The food systems monitoring landscape is multisectoral, decentralised, and evolving. The country has made important advances in building national information management systems, including the Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (CDHS), Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES), Cambodian Agricultural Survey (CAS), and administrative systems across ministries. However, monitoring remains fragmented across sectors and institutions. The fragmentation prevents the integrated analysis required for food systems transformation, such as linking food affordability to poverty or climate shocks to nutrition outcomes, resulting in policy silos, inefficient resource allocation, and reduced impact of public investments. Strengthening monitoring systems is therefore essential not only for tracking progress, but for enabling evidence-based, effective decision-making, cross-sectoral coordination, and accountability.

Countdown themes and indicator groups. Outer shapes refer to cross-cutting themes. Interior circles refer to long-term outcomes.



- 1 National Institute of Statistics. (2024). Cambodia Agriculture Survey 2024. Phnom Penh: National Institute of Statistics.
- 2 Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2026) Annual Report for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Sector for 2025. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
- 3 National Institute of Statistics. (2023). Cambodia Agriculture Census 2023. Phnom Penh: National Institute of Statistics.
- 4 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2023). Hand-in-Hand Initiative: Cambodia Country Profile. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.
- 5 Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. (2025). Agricultural Trade and Production Statistics. Phnom Penh: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
- 6 Open Development Cambodia. (2024). Agricultural Production and Trade Data. Phnom Penh.
- 7 National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Health and ICF (2022) Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021–22. Phnom Penh and Rockville, MD.
- 8 World Food Programme. (2023). Cambodia Country Brief. Rome: World Food Programme.

This policy brief examines the current state of food systems monitoring in Cambodia and provides recommendations for building an integrated monitoring system that can drive sustainable transformation.

The Food Systems Countdown Initiative

The Food Systems Countdown Initiative emerged from the United Nations Food Systems Summit as an interdisciplinary collaboration that now includes over 65 food systems experts from dozens of institutions worldwide. The Countdown developed a global monitoring framework, comprising five themes: (1) Diets, nutrition, and health; (2) Environment, natural resources, and production; (3) Livelihoods, poverty, and equity; (4) Governance; and (5) Resilience⁹. Through a consultative process, a core set of 50 indicators was identified across these themes, forming the global indicator framework used to track progress in food system transformation. The Countdown publishes annual monitoring updates alongside thematic analysis to assess global trends and policy-relevant shifts in food systems. In recent years, the Countdown's global indicator framework is being adapted to the country level to reflect national needs, priorities, and data systems and Cambodia has elected to be part of this process through its broader efforts to strengthen evidence-based food system governance.

The Countdown should be understood as a supporting framework, rather than a parallel monitoring system for Cambodia. Its value lies in strengthening Cambodia's existing monitoring architecture and aligning reporting across national and global commitments. Applied effectively, the Countdown can support implementation of strategic initiatives, align reporting, and strengthen coherence across ministries and partners. It can help ensure that monitoring remains nationally owned, while benefiting from global comparability and methodological rigour. Cambodia is well positioned to develop a strong food systems monitoring system, and its high-quality national surveys and datasets already provide a robust foundation. Administrative systems across ministries, together with the Commune Database (CDB), offer a pathway to link national indicators with sub-national planning. The country's comparative advantage lies in its ability to connect national data to provincial disparities and commune-level decision-making, supported by established coordination mechanisms under CARD. The remaining challenge is, therefore, not the availability of data, but its integration, prioritisation, and effective use for policy and planning.

Prioritised Indicators

The starting point for indicator selection was a review of Cambodia's national sectoral and multisectoral strategies¹⁰ relevant to food systems, together with the country's commitments under global and regional initiatives including the Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs), Nutrition for Growth (N4G) commitments, Cambodia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 3.0, and the

Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation (ACF), with the aim of developing a common indicator framework that rationalises monitoring requirements, strengthens coherence across institutions, and simplifies reporting processes, while improving their usefulness for decision-making.

Stakeholder consultations in February 2026 confirmed broad agreement on a set of priority indicators aligned with Cambodia's policy frameworks and data systems as well as the Countdown global framework. This workshop brought together stakeholders across government, development partners, academia, civil society, and the private sector to identify Cambodia's priority indicators across the Countdown's five themes. Stakeholders reviewed indicators with available data, emphasising relevance to policy, methodological soundness, feasibility, and coverage.

Within the **Diets, nutrition, and health** theme, Cambodian stakeholders recommended priority indicators including dietary diversity scores and unhealthy food consumption across different age groups. Stakeholders emphasised the need for indicators related to school feeding, access to safe water, iodised salt use, and measurement of food insecurity, using both the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and the Food Consumption Score. Key nutrition indicators aligned with the Countdown included minimum dietary diversity for women and children, affordability of healthy diets, and unhealthy food consumption.

For **Environment, natural resources, and production**, various indicators were prioritised, with participants emphasising climate change mitigation through reducing greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable and climate-smart production practices, and food production metrics. Suggested indicators included agriculture value added, and sustainable land management practices. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of irrigation coverage, sustainable energy use on farms, crop diversification, and climate adaptation measures such as forest cover and protected areas. Aquaculture and fisheries production and food loss and waste were also identified, although there are no current sources of data for amounts of food waste.

Under the theme of **Livelihoods, poverty, and equity**, stakeholders prioritised indicators measuring agricultural employment, income from agriculture, labour productivity, social protection coverage, and land ownership by gender. Key indicators included women's and youth engagement in agricultural cooperatives and entrepreneurship, employment and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises in food processing and numbers of smallholders in modern agricultural cooperatives.

In the **Governance** theme, stakeholders focused on women in local governance, private sector engagement,

9 2026 GAIN, The Columbia Climate School, Cornell University, and FAO, The Food Systems Countdown Initiative. Viewed at: <https://www.foodcountdown.org/indicator-architecture>

10 Including the Royal Government of Cambodia's Second Roadmap for Food Systems for Sustainable Development 2025–2030 and the Third National Strategy for Food Security and Nutrition (NSFSN) 2024–2028.

the functionality of multi-sectoral platforms for food systems governance, incorporation of food security and food systems actions in commune plans, food safety inspections, and the presence of climate implementation plans.

Under **Resilience**, the participants recommended the inclusion of cropland area affected by droughts and flooding, communes with updated disaster plans, household climate risk exposure, market access and food price anomalies, households using crisis coping strategies, and levels of local food reserves. They also suggested inclusion of early warning systems, extension agents trained in disaster resilience, coverage of shock-responsive cash transfers, and percentage of villages with emergency water access.

Together, these indicators provide a sturdy foundation for monitoring the transformation of the food system. However, their effectiveness depends on the ability to integrate data across sectors and link monitoring to policy action.

Data Availability and Gaps

Despite strong foundations, critical gaps limit effective monitoring. There is limited information related to food environments, including affordability, access, and consumption of healthy versus unhealthy foods. This restricts the ability to track dietary change and address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, creating a critical blind spot in understanding how food systems influence nutrition outcomes. Moving upstream, data are weak for the middle of the value chain, including food processing, storage, distribution, and markets. This limits understanding of economic transformation within the food system. Gender-disaggregated data for value chains are particularly lacking. Without this information, it is difficult to assess how value chains contribute to income generation, food availability, and resilience—and for whom.

Data on climate and natural resources are limited, with gaps on soil health, water quality, biodiversity, and agricultural emissions. These gaps constrain Cambodia's ability to align food systems monitoring for NDC 3.0 and broader climate commitments¹¹. Furthermore, it may limit access to climate finance (i.e., as it is not possible to demonstrate the required impact) and undermines efforts to track mitigation and adaptation outcomes. In addition, there is limited routine measurement of governance effectiveness, programme implementation, institutional performance, and accountability across sectors. Without such indicators, it is not possible to assess whether policies are being effectively implemented in Cambodia or to identify areas requiring corrective action.

Stakeholder consultations confirm that Cambodia's primary constraint is not data availability, but the lack of formalised governance mechanisms for data sharing, integration, and use. Fragmented data systems prevent Cambodia from analysing how interventions in agriculture, markets, and social protection interact, resulting in policy

silos and limiting the effectiveness of public investment. Taken together, these issues prevent Cambodia from linking production, markets, diets, and health outcomes, undermining the core premise of food systems transformation and limiting the effectiveness of public investment.

Recommendations for Strengthening Monitoring-Policy Linkages

- 1. Establish a national food systems monitoring architecture:** Develop a unified monitoring system led by CARD and anchored in NIS, with clearly defined institutional roles across ministries. This mechanism should formalise coordination, ensure data standardisation, and align monitoring across national strategies and international commitments. Formal endorsement and institutional mandates are essential to enable cross-sectoral data integration, particularly where indicators span multiple ministerial responsibilities. A strengthened monitoring system would also support Cambodia's ability to access and manage climate and development financing by improving transparency, accountability, and the measurement of adaptation and resilience outcomes.
- 2. Integrate monitoring into planning processes:** Embed priority indicators within national and sub-national planning processes, including sector strategies and Commune Investment Programmes and Development Plans.
- 3. Integrate monitoring into budgeting systems:** Link monitoring results to budget allocation and programme design to ensure that data directly informs policy decisions.
- 4. Develop a national monitoring dashboard with accountability mechanisms:** Establish and maintain a publicly accessible dashboard hosted by NIS that tracks progress against key indicators and national commitments. The system should include accountability triggers, requiring responsible institutions to review underperforming indicators and propose corrective actions. Regular public reporting can strengthen institutional accountability and encourage more timely policy responses where indicators show deteriorating trends.
- 5. Adopt a phased, policy-driven approach to strengthening data systems:** Begin with a core set of indicators that are supported by existing data systems to enable rapid operationalisation. Indicator selection must balance methodological robustness with institutional feasibility, prioritising indicators that are both policy-relevant and reportable within existing systems. In parallel, invest in closing critical data gaps, particularly in food environments, value chains, climate, and governance, aligned with national priorities and financing opportunities, including NDC 3.0.

11 UNFCCC/National Council for Sustainable Development. (2025). Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0). Phnom Penh.