

Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems: A New Toolkit



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

Policy coherence is fundamental for effective food systems transformation.

Not only do such transformative processes aim to address multifaceted challenges related to nutrition, environmental sustainability, economic development, and social equity, but they must do so within a system that is inherently dynamic and interconnected. Without coherent approaches, even well-intentioned policies may undermine one another, diluting their collective impact and squandering limited resources. Yet examples of incoherence are not uncommon. For example, governments often have health-sector policies that

promote increased consumption of healthy foods to reduce levels of diet-related diseases such as diabetes—while also subsidising production of ingredients often used to produce unhealthy foods, such as sugar, edible oils, and refined grains.

Policy incoherence can lead to inefficiency and lower likelihood of achieving policy goals, as well as missed opportunities for leveraging synergies across policy areas where they exist. As governments worldwide increasingly recognise the interconnected nature of food systems issues, there is growing acknowledgment of the need for more coherent policies: policies designed to improve one

1. Adapted from Parsons & Hawkes. 2019. Policy Coherence in Food Systems. London: Centre for Food Policy, City University London.

food systems outcome must not inadvertently undermine others but instead reinforce them.

Despite this need, assessing the extent of coherence in a country's food policy landscape is challenging, with no standardised or easy-to-use empirical approaches. New work by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, in collaboration

with AKADEMIYA2063, aim to address this. Building upon existing frameworks and approaches, such as those developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Environment Programme, we have developed a Food Systems Policy Coherence Diagnostic Toolkit.

This toolkit, which has been tested in multiple countries in Africa and Asia, offers a practical methodology to assess food systems policy coherence and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing it.

Target Goals



Zero Hunger

- Increased supply of main staple foods
- Affordable prices for main staple foods



Climate & Disaster Resilience

- Climate change mitigation via food systems
- Food systems better adapted to climate change



Healthy Diets

- Increased consumption of nutritious food
- Less unhealthy food consumption



Reduction of Food Loss & Waste



Decent Work for Food Systems Workers

- Adequate wages for workers
- More effective nutrition-sensitive social protection



Inclusion & Empowerment of Women & Girls

The Food Systems Policy Coherence Diagnostic Tool consists of two modules.

Module 1 examines whether there are structures and mechanisms in place that would increase the likelihood of achieving policy coherence, such as whether a country has a cross-sectoral food systems policy or pathway and ongoing mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination on food issues.

Module 2 considers the actual conflicts and synergies between existing policies, focusing on the achievement of six key goals of food system transformation, drawn from the UN Food Systems Summit process, as shown at left.

The tool is completed by reviewing key policy documents and consulting with key informants, followed by stakeholder validation and ongoing engagement to craft locally relevant, actionable recommendations for improving policy coherence. Accompanied by a user's manual, scoring guidelines, and examples, the toolkit aims to provide a ready-to-use, feasible, and actionable way to understand policy coherence.

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, governments can better align efforts towards achieving key goals.

You can access the tool and supporting resources here: <https://www.gainhealth.org/policy-coherence-toolkit>

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