Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems
Results from India

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gain
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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 India 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 India, shown below, indicate that India's food system policy landscape is strong in providing the framework documents to guide food system transformation and that these are backed up by political commitment, but that there are areas to strengthen in terms of capacity and implementation, coordination structures, inclusivity and stakeholder engagement, and particularly monitoring and accountability.

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

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

Domain	Analysis and Recommendations
Framework Documents	India's pathways document provides a foundation for food systems transformation including a vision for the future that cuts across multiple domains of the food system. However, it could be strengthened by highlighting existing food system challenges, setting priorities to address them, and including clear plans for targeted interventions.
Political Commitment	India's senior leadership has publicly supported this vision, demonstrating high-level political commitment.
Capacity & Implementation	While India has invested in capacity building of government staff on food systems and has numerous policies and strategies that align with its pathway, it could strengthen several areas of capacity/implementation: · Multiple consultations led to the finalisation of India's pathway document. Efforts should be made to formally adopt or ratify it into mainstream policy, which could strengthen the likelihood of implementation · It would be useful to develop a more comprehensive action plan for pathway implementation. · While there is budget allocated for different national programmes targeting food systems goals, it is not comprehensively and specifically linked to the pathway. Stakeholders could consider creating a more comprehensive investment plan or budget to ensure all aspects of the pathway are funded.
Coordination Structures	· There is no lead institution responsible for food system transformation (cutting across sectoral ministries); stakeholders could consider creating or designating such an institution, to improve coordination. · Stakeholders might consider creating platforms to promote dialogue and coordination within government across sectors on the topic of food systems.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement & Voice	While India held inclusive dialogues to develop its pathway, stakeholders might consider putting in place mechanisms for ongoing consultation of technical/scientific experts on food system policies that cut across different sectors.
Monitoring & Accountability	Stakeholders could consider developing key performance indicators for their national pathway, along with reporting milestones, mechanisms, and responsibilities, such as systems that ensure action on feedback from monitoring. Once those are in place it will be essential to ensure results of the monitoring of these indicators are publicly reported. They could also consider mechanisms for ensuring monitoring is participatory, that the pathway is subject to regular review, and that there are methods in place for assessing potential impacts of policies on different parts of the food system (i.e., synergies and trade-offs).

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 India 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 increasing nutritious food consumption to contribute to healthy diets for all.

Coherence between India'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 coherent	Somewhat incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
	Affordable prices for main staples	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
Climate Resilience	Adaptation	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
	Climate change mitigation	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Somewhat incoherent	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
Healthy Diets	More nutritious food consumption	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat incoherent	Somewhat incoherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent
	Less unhealthy food consumption	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent
	Reduction of Food Loss & Waste	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent
Decent Work	Adequate wages for food system workers	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
	Effective nutrition-sensitive social protection	Not assessed	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
	Empowerment of Women & Girls	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent

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 , most policy areas were found to be fully or highly coherent with most food systems goals. This was particularly true for social policies and industrial/economic/monetary policies. For example, areas of strength included:

Social policies help reduce hunger through social protection targeting poor rural households, constitutional recognition of the Right to Food, and food subsidies or transfers for the most vulnerable households.

Industrial, economic, and monetary policies support decent work through minimum and living wages for food system workers and fostering nutrition-sensitive social protection through food price stabilisation efforts.

More incoherence was found when it came to **agricultural policies** (particularly with achieving goals of climate change mitigation, less unhealthy food consumption, and adequate wages for food systems workers). For example, output-linked food production subsidies and fertiliser subsidies can encourage overproduction and overuse of fertiliser, respectively, and increasing agricultural mechanisation is not accompanied by strong efforts to mitigate the resulting greenhouse gas emissions. All of these could contradict the goal of climate change mitigation through food systems. Subsidies for producers of oilseeds could potentially lead to overproduction and artificially low prices for consumers and processors; while some amount of fat is needed in a healthy diet, in general, excess supplies (or cheap prices) of edible oils could encourage overconsumption and excessive use in food processing, contradicting the goal of healthy diets for all. In contrast, agriculture policies were fully coherent with increasing the supply of staple crops and reducing their prices, such as through research and development and extension services focused on staples, as well as more consumption of nutritious foods, such as through support for biofortification, extension services for horticultural crops, and support for cold chain infrastructure.

While **health policies** support climate and disaster resilience by recognising climate change as a threat to human health, including efforts to control vector-borne diseases and having an action plan for heat-related illnesses. They support women's empowerment through subsidising maternal healthcare, supporting access to contraception, and targeting outreach on family and child nutrition and health topics to men as well as women. However, they are somewhat incoherent with goals of climate change mitigation, as dietary guidelines and similar instruments do not clearly note the importance of choosing lower-emissions nutritious foods as part of a healthy diet.

Environmental policies also showed some areas of incoherence, such as supporting land consolidation (at state level), which may lead to increased production of staple crops at the expense of more nutritious crops and thus lower consumption of nutritious foods. Limits on fishing, while often motivated by important environmental goals and supporting of maintaining fish stocks for the future, can have short-term conflicts with achieving more nutritious food consumption if they make fish (a highly nutritious food) more expensive or less available. They thus may need to be accompanied by mitigating measures to ensure continued access to healthy diets.

Trade policies were the policy domain with the highest level of incoherence. For example, tariffs on agricultural inputs could lead to higher prices, hindering efforts to achieve Zero Hunger. And not including strong clauses related to worker protections in trade agreements may be a missed opportunity for achieving synergies between supporting trade and decent work.

Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, policies in India are heavily decentralised, whereas this application was conducted at the national level. 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 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, India'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: