



# Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems Results from Kenya







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<sup>1</sup>.

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 Kenya 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 Kenya, shown below, indicate that Kenya'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, with strong progress on capacity and implementation. There are areas to strengthen in terms of coordination structures, inclusivity and stakeholder engagement, and particularly monitoring and accountability.

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

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

| Domain   | Analysis and Recommendations   |
|--|--|
| <b>Framework Documents</b>   | Kenya's Pathway to Sustainable Food Systems, submitted as part of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), provides a foundation for food systems transformation including a vision for the future of food systems that are inclusive, innovative, collaborative and dynamic. In addition, Kenya has drafted a National Food Systems Policy (2024) and initiated the Kilimo Kwanza Food Systems strategy. The pathway has specific actions and a target year (2030), and it cuts across multiple domains of the food system. It sets <b>priorities</b> for action, such as increasing farmers' incomes and reducing childhood malnutrition, and includes discussion of interventions, such as supporting youth empowerment in food systems through clubs, training, and incentives.  |
| <b>Political Commitment</b>  | Kenya's President at the time, Uhuru Kenyatta, publicly supported this vision through a statement at the UNFSS, demonstrating <b>high-level political commitment</b> .   |
| <b>Capacity &amp; Implementation</b>   | Kenya's pathway has been <b>formally adopted</b> by the government, and an action plan setting out an approach for operationalising it has been developed. Many of the priorities in the pathway were based on preexisting national policies, strategies, and plans. An <b>investment plan</b> has also been developed. In addition, Kenya has invested in <b>capacity building</b> of government staff on food systems. All these points suggest strong capacity for implementation of the pathway, though these initial steps will need to be followed through with concrete actions.  |
| <b>Coordination Structures</b>   | Coordination on food systems topics in Kenya is supported by having a <b>national-level platform</b> to discuss food systems issues across government actors and sectors, having food systems <b>champions</b> embedded in different government departments, and having mechanisms to engage provincial and district-level governments in policy processes, to support national-level approaches being consistent with local-level ones. Kenya has a <b>lead institution</b> responsible for food system transformation, the Ministry of Agriculture. While being a sectoral ministry may limit its ability to ensure full engagement of other ministries and stakeholders could consider elevating this position to be cross-ministerial, the Prime Minister's Office has established a National Food Systems Coordination Unit.  |
| <b>Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement &amp; Voice</b>   | Kenya held several <b>dialogues</b> to develop its pathway, and these were generally inclusive of different stakeholder types. There are ongoing mechanisms in place for consulting non-governmental, non-scientific stakeholders (e.g., citizens, civil society groups, private sector groups) on policy questions. While there are also mechanisms for <b>consulting technical/scientific experts</b> on food system policies, these do not necessarily have a cross-sectoral focus, which may be a missed opportunity to ensure diverse technical views are heard in order to prevent unintended consequences of policy implementation.   |
| <b>Monitoring &amp; Accountability</b>   | Kenya's pathway includes some <b>key performance indicators</b> , though these could be more comprehensive in terms of encompassing a broader set of goals articulated in the pathway. There are also reporting <b>milestones, mechanisms, and responsibilities</b> , though the responsibilities could be more clearly structured to ensure it is clear which division of the government is responsible for tracking which outcomes. To date, no comprehensive results of monitoring progress on pathway implementation, using validated data for key indicators, have been published – indicating an important area for strengthening.<br><br>While the pathway is meant to be subject to regular review and revision, no specific <b>review period</b> is specified. While there are methods in place for assessing potential impacts of policies on different parts of the food system (i.e., synergies and trade-offs), these do not necessarily include clear consideration of cross-sectoral impacts. And while there are efforts to build public-sector capacity for analysing policy impacts, this is not specific to food systems. All of these could be potential areas for strengthening, as well. |
| <b>Note:</b> 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 Kenya 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, trade policies are shown to be somewhat incoherent with the goal of climate change mitigation, a part of overall climate resilience.

### Coherence between Nigeria'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 many food systems goals.

**Social policies** were the area with the highest coherence overall. For example, social policies in Kenya may help reduce hunger through social protection policies targeting poor rural households, official recognition of the Right to Food, and food subsidies or transfers for the most vulnerable households. They help promote healthy diets by encouraging household livelihood diversification for diet diversification and providing nutrition education for some social protection recipients. They could do more to support this goal if they required supplying highly nutritious foods, potentially including biofortified or fortified foods, though social protection programmes or included requirements for nutritious meals in workplace canteens.



**Agricultural policies** were largely coherent with zero hunger goals, such as through research and development and extension

services focused on staples. They also support more consumption of nutritious foods, such as through support for biofortification, extension services for horticultural crops, and support for cold chain infrastructure. However, input subsidies largely favour staple crops – potentially at the expense of more nutritious non-staples such as fruit and vegetables. Agriculture policies were highly coherent with climate change adaptation goals through research and development of

climate-resilient seeds and livestock breeds, support for adoption of climate-smart practices, and support for water conservation and irrigation expansion. However, they were less consistent with climate change mitigation goals. For example, output-linked food production subsidies and fertiliser subsidies can encourage overproduction and overuse of fertiliser, respectively, and increasing agricultural mechanisation without strong efforts to mitigate the resulting greenhouse gas emissions could result in emissions increases. Reducing consumption of unhealthy food was also an area of tension. Subsidies for producers of oilseeds and/or sugar crops 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 reducing consumption of unhealthy food.



**Industrial, economic, and monetary policies** support

hunger reduction by recognising the importance of agriculture as a sector for economic growth and supporting development of last-mile infrastructure; they could do more if they provided more direct support to smallholder farmers or put in place stronger controls against excessive pricing (including of food). They support social protection by enabling collaboration with international aid agencies, including

on food aid, and using measures to ensure access to food amid shocks, such as national food reserves. They could do more to support adequate wages for food system workers by ensuring adequate earnings in line with a living wage. Moreover, policy coherence with the goal of reducing unhealthy food consumption could be improved by introducing taxes on unhealthy foods or companies that produce them or providing incentives for companies producing nutritious foods.



While **health policies** support climate and disaster resilience by recognising climate change as a threat to human health and

including efforts to control vector-borne diseases, they could do more to support climate change mitigation by promoting dietary shifts towards lower-emissions nutritious foods. They support women's empowerment through subsidised maternal and child healthcare, supporting access to contraception, and providing gender-sensitive health services. They could do more by ensuring that outreach on family nutrition, maternal and child health topics is targeted to men as well as women.



**Environmental policies** were largely coherent with hunger reduction, climate resilience, women's empowerment, and food loss and waste reduction goals. For example, they support food loss and waste reduction

by including support for composting and converting food waste to renewable energy. However, they showed more incoherence when it came to the healthy diets goal. For example, 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. And while Kenya has banned the use of single-use carrier bags, expanding this ban to more types of single-use plastic packaging could help to reduce consumption of unhealthy foods, which tend to rely on these types of packaging.



**Trade policies** were the policy domain with the highest level of incoherence. For example, tariffs on imports of main staple crops could lead to higher prices, hindering efforts to achieve Zero Hunger. Climate change mitigation goals may be undermined by trade agreements not including strong environmental sustainability clauses or export taxes on food products that are associated with deforestation or high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. However, trade policies do support adequate work through ratifying trade agreements that have provisions protecting worker's rights and that oblige ratifying countries to align with guidelines of the International Labour Organization.





## Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, this application was conducted at the national level, whereas in Kenya many decision-making powers are devolved to counties. Relevant county-level policies and initiatives are not reflected here, 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, it 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, Kenya'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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