Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems

Results from Pakistan

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 Pakistan 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 Pakistan, shown below, indicate that Pakistan's food system policy landscape is strong in providing the framework documents to guide food system transformation, with inclusive processes with stakeholder engagement, and that these are backed up by political commitment. There are, however, areas to strengthen in terms of capacity and implementation, coordination structures, and particularly monitoring and accountability.

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

Domain	Analysis and Recommendations
Framework Documents	Pakistan has developed a food system pathway document, which was submitted through the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) process. It considers multiple food system sectors, presents a clear vision with a target date (2030), outlines priorities, specifies measures and interventions, and was developed through broad stakeholder engagement. Overall, it provides a strong foundation for food systems transformation. Despite its comprehensive approach, Pakistan's pathway document does not explicitly address gender considerations in food system transformation, though these are crucial for ensuring inclusive policies. Future revisions could consider integrating more gender & youth-sensitive approaches, and in the future there is a need to ensure the Food Systems Transformation Vision 2030 is well reflected in federal/provincial Medium-Term Development Frameworks and sectoral plans.

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

Domain	Analysis and Recommendations
Political Commitment	At the 2021 UNFSS, a Federal Minister from Pakistan provided a statement in support of a food systems approach, demonstrating high-level political commitment. Continuity of food system policies is supported by inclusion of the pathway priorities in manifestos of major political parties, institutionalised food security strategies, and a dedicated Food System Secretariat equipped with Pakistan sub-national food systems dashboard hub at PARC.
Capacity & Implementation	Pakistan has formally adopted its national food system pathway and begun integrating food system priorities into sectoral policies. An action plan and an investment plan to operationalise the pathway are both under development, but budgetary commitments and long-term financing mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure effective implementation, as a lack of earmarked budget lines hinders progress. While some capacity-building efforts are being undertaken to strengthen government staff's technical expertise on food systems, a more comprehensive and strategic approach is required to ensure long-term institutionalisation, particularly ensuring that focal persons have clear terms of reference and time available for food systems coordination.
Coordination Structures	Pakistan has a lead government institution, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, responsible for food system transformation with support from the Food System Secretariat at Pakistan Agricultural Research Council. While this provides strong leadership in food system governance, housing the role within a sectoral ministry may limit its ability to ensure full engagement of other ministries; stakeholders could consider elevating this position to be cross-ministerial. The Food System Secretariat facilitates national-level inter-ministerial dialogue and collaboration, but elevating its mandate through formal Cabinet-level notification would help legitimise its cross-sectoral role. In addition to government officials within most ministries who act as food systems champions, there are about 300 champions for evidence-based policymaking in academia. While the Secretariat engages with provincial governments to encourage vertical coherence in policies, this coordination could be strengthened and more authority for food policy devolved to provincial food policy units; establishing inter-provincial coordination mechanisms, fiscal alignment, and provincial-level capacity-building could also help to institutionalise cross-sectoral collaboration and vertical coherence. Finally, more focus on municipal food systems governance, such as through local market committees, will be needed as Pakistan continues to urbanise.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement & Voice	Pakistan demonstrated strong stakeholder engagement in the run-up to the 2021 UNFSS, organising multiple dialogues with representation from diverse stakeholder groups, including government, businesses, farmers, civil society, academia, and consumer groups. There are mechanisms in place for technical consultation with non-governmental experts, fostering evidence-based policymaking across multiple sectors. Pakistan has also established mechanisms for regular consultation with civil society and private-sector groups, though expanding these across all policy stages is an area for further strengthening. However, there are opportunities for strengthening the voice and inclusion of women and youth in policies and policy-making processes.
Monitoring & Accountability	Monitoring of and accountability for food systems transformation is a key area for strengthening. Stakeholders could consider developing key performance indicators for their national pathway, along with reporting milestones, mechanisms, and responsibilities for monitoring, including participatory approaches where relevant. Public dashboards, data integration with existing platforms such as Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Planning's SDG dashboards, and annual food systems scorecards could serve to reinforce transparency and ownership. Monitoring can also leverage ongoing efforts like Pakistan's Social and Living Standards Measurement surveys by embedding relevant food systems indicators within them. Once these are in place, it will be essential to regularly report publicly on monitoring results, including the key performance indicators. Stakeholders could also consider mechanisms for ensuring that the pathway is subject to regular review and putting in place methods 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 Pakistan 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, environmental policies are shown to be somewhat incoherent with the goal of increasing nutritious food consumption to contribute to healthy diets for all.

Coherence between Pakistan's Policies and Key Food System Goals

Goal group	Goal	Agriculture	Health	Environment	Trade	Social	Industrial, Economic & Monetary
Zero Hunger	Increased supply of main staples	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
Zero Hunger	Affordable prices for main staples	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent
Climate Resilience	Adaptation	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent
Climate Resilience	Climate change mitigation	Somewhat incoherent	Somewhat incoherent	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Somewhat incoherent	Somewhat coherent
Healthy Diets	More nutritious food consumption	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat incoherent	Somewhat coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent
Healthy Diets	Less unhealthy food consumption	Highly incoherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat incoherent	Somewhat coherent
	Reduction of Food Loss & Waste	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent
Decent Work	Adequate wages for food system workers	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly incoherent
Decent Work	Effective nutrition-sensitive social protection	Not assessed	Highly Coherent	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent
	Empowerment of Women & Girls	Neither coherent nor incoherent	Somewhat coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly Coherent	Somewhat coherent	Highly 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, many policy areas were found to be highly or somewhat coherent with most food systems goals. This was particularly true for trade policies and industrial/economic/monetary policies.

For example, **Industrial, economic, and monetary policies** support hunger reduction by recognising the importance of agriculture as a sector for economic growth, supporting development of last-mile infrastructure, and providing interest rate concessions and financial incentives for farmers. 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 wheat reserves. They could do more to support adequate wages for food system workers by ensuring adequate earnings in line with a living wage. While they support climate change mitigation through a commitment to 'green growth' and support for adopting low-carbon technologies, they could do more by including more incentives for climate change mitigation in the food and agriculture sectors and by adopting carbon markets.

Trade policies support hunger reduction through generally low tariffs on imports of staple crops and their inputs. They support adequate work through trade agreements that have provisions protecting worker's rights and aligning with guidelines of the International Labour Organization, such as the GSP Plus agreement with the European Union, which mandates labour law reforms and reinforces commitments to fair wages and decent work standards. While they help reduce food loss and waste through rapid clearance of perishable commodities and efforts to facilitate trade such as ratifying the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, they could do more to improve the quality of trade facilitation by improving efficiency of customs processes and trying to reduce the level of export rejections due to non-compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary measures and similar regulations.

Agriculture policies were highly coherent with increasing the supply of staple crops and reducing their prices, such as through research and development (R&D) and extension services focused on staples, support for irrigation expansion and maintenance, subsidies for certain staple crop inputs, market information systems, and crop futures markets. However, funding for R&D could be increased and crop futures markets strengthened. Agricultural policies had more areas of incoherence with the healthy diets goal. For example, many extension services and R&D efforts focus on staple crops, with limited relative investment in fruit and vegetables as well as pulses and livestock. Subsidies for producers of sugar crops could potentially lead to overproduction and artificially low prices for consumers and processors. In general, agricultural support mechanisms could be realigned to reduce market distortions that discourage crop diversification.

In contrast, **health policies** were largely supportive of healthy diets, such as through public awareness campaigns on nutrition, nutritional labelling regulations, and mandatory fortification requirements. They also support women's empowerment through subsidised maternal healthcare and supporting access to contraception, and targeting outreach on family nutrition, maternal, and child health topics to men as well as women. However, they are somewhat incoherent with climate change mitigation, as their dietary guidelines and similar instruments do not clearly note the importance of choosing lower-emissions nutritious foods as part of a healthy diet. This is an area for strengthening in the forthcoming National Nutrition Policy.

Environmental policies also showed some areas of incoherence, such as supporting land consolidation, which may lead to increased production of staple crops at the expense of more nutritious crops and thus lower consumption of nutritious foods. There is also a need to further limit expansion of cropland (particularly for water-intensive crops like sugarcane) in water-stressed areas. However, environmental policies were highly coherent with climate resilience goals, such as through efforts to improve soil conservation and better manage forest resources,

promotion of renewable energy, and support for early warning systems for disasters and land conservation. They were also coherent with increased staple crop production, such as through support for more efficient use of pesticides and fertilisers, promotion of drought-tolerant varieties, and efforts to improve soil fertility.

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. They could do more to support climate change mitigation if they included carbon capture activities as part of public works programmes, supported training for workers in green jobs in food systems, and required food aid programmes to use sustainable sourcing. Similarly, they could be more supportive of healthy diets goals if they included requirements for nutritious foods, potentially including fortified or biofortified foods, in public procurement programmes and regulated nutritional content of meals in workplace canteens. They support nutrition-sensitive social protection through prioritising nutrition of vulnerable groups and including behaviour change communication on nutrition, but they could do more if they mandated high nutritional standards for school meals.

Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, this application was conducted at the national level, so relevant province-level policies and initiatives 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, Pakistan'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: