Diagnosing Policy Coherence for Food Systems

Results from Bangladesh

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Global Alliance for
Improved Nutrition

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 Bangladesh 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 Bangladesh, shown below, indicate that Bangladesh'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.

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

Domain	Analysis and Recommendations
Framework Documents	Bangladesh's pathways document, developed via a multistakeholder approach comprising of 18 ministries and submitted to the UNFSS process in 2021, provides a foundation for transforming its food system. It cuts across sectors and includes a vision for the future aligned with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It highlights **existing food system challenges,** sets **priorities** to address them, and includes plans for targeted interventions.
Political Commitment	Bangladesh's senior leadership has publicly supported this vision, including through a statement at UNFSS 2021, demonstrating high-level **political commitment.** This commitment has continued under the new administration, partly thanks to identifying the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) to serve as the nodal agency to carry forward the food systems transformation agenda.
Capacity & Implementation	Implementing Bangladesh's pathway is supported by the document being **formally approved** by the Ministry of Food and by efforts to b**uild the capacity** of government staff on food systems topics. While some of the pathway priorities have been included in sectoral policies, strategies, or plans, there is room for extending this to a **wider range of sectors**. While the country has already launched some targeted initiatives to address specific food system issues, a comprehensive **action plan** encompassing all aspects of the pathway is still under development—though at an advanced stage and expected to be announced in mid-2025. A **costed investment plan** is also under development. Both processes should be followed through to their conclusion to provide the necessary structure and resources for pathway implementation.
Coordination Structures	Coordination is supported by having a **lead institution** responsible for food system transformation, the Ministry of Food, with FPMU holding the secretariat function. This provides strong leadership in food system governance. Coordination is also supported by standing **platforms for dialogue and coordination** on both general and specific food systems topics and structures that can engage different levels of government in food systems policy to support vertical coherence. However, the country would benefit from having designated **champions** or advocates for a coherent food systems approach embedded within different government agencies.
Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement & Voice	Bangladesh had inclusive dialogues to develop its pathway and has mechanisms for c**onsulting technical/scientific experts** on food system policies that cut across different sectors. However, stakeholders might consider putting in place structures that are able to more regularly consult non-governmental, non-scientific stakeholders (e.g., civil society and the private sector) on food systems topics.
Monitoring & Accountability	Bangladesh's pathway is supported by **key performance indicators** and reporting **milestones**, **mechanisms**, and **responsibilities**. However, to date only limited data on actual progress in food system transformation, aligning to identified indicators and targets, has been shared; reporting on these **results** should be a priority for the future. The government could also consider ways to make sure that monitoring is more participatory, that the pathway is subject to regular **review** with a specific review period, and that there are methods in place for routinely **assessing potential impacts** of policies on different parts of the food system across sectors (i.e., synergies and trade-offs) as well as efforts to build government capacity to apply them.

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 Bangladesh 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, agriculture policies are shown to be somewhat incoherent with the goal of reducing unhealthy food consumption to contribute to healthy diets for all.

Coherence between Bangladesh's Policies and Key Food System Goals

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

For example, **social policies** help reduce hunger through social protection policies targeting poor rural households, constitutional recognition of the Right to Food, and food subsidies or transfers for the most vulnerable households. They support climate change adaptation by providing temporary assistance (including cash transfers) during natural disasters, such as floods and cyclones, and by including measures to build longer-term resilience, such as supporting access to small livestock. However, they could do more on this front by providing more comprehensive support to prevent credit defaults among small- and medium-scale food producers following disasters.

Industrial, economic, and monetary policies support climate change mitigation through a commitment to green growth, support to agri-food firms to contribute to climate change (such as through carbon capture efforts), and measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, more effort could be paid to making sure these policies include specific provisions focused on the food sector. The policies support healthy diets by reducing or removing value-added tax on certain nutritious food products, taxing sugar-sweetened beverages, providing financial incentives to crop producers, and supporting the development of rural infrastructure.

Agricultural policies were generally 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. However, they were somewhat incoherent with the goal of reducing consumption of unhealthy foods by subsidising inputs for oilseed and sugar crop producers including through import substitution initiatives. They were highly coherent with goals of reducing food loss and waste such as through support for farm management practices to reduce post-harvest losses, not mandating harvest dates for most crops, and support for circular economy practices like diverting food scraps for use in feed. However, they could do more by creating marketing arrangements to buy surpluses directly from farmers to try to prevent food loss/waste.

Health policies support women's empowerment through subsidised maternal healthcare, supporting access to contraception, and targeting outreach on family nutrition, maternal, and child health topics to men as well as women. However, they could do more to support decent work if they included guidelines for workforce nutrition for food system workers and ensured these workers have access to health checks at work and health insurance. They support climate and disaster resilience by recognising climate change as a threat to human health, including efforts to control vector-borne diseases, and ensuring provision of healthcare after natural disasters. They could, however, strengthen efforts to address heat-related illnesses. While some policies support the goal of choosing lower-emissions nutritious foods as part of a healthy diet to support climate change mitigation, this could be strengthened through explicit inclusion of sustainability aspects in the national food-based dietary guidelines.

Environmental policies were largely supportive of climate adaptation and mitigation goals, such as through efforts to improve soil conservation and fertility, maintain early warning systems, supporting reforestation and agroforestry, and supporting water use efficiency including through renewable energy-based irrigation. Water availability for agriculture remains a challenge in need of stronger policy solutions, however. Environmental policies had some incoherence with 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.

Trade policies were the policy domain with the highest level of incoherence. For example, tariffs and other restrictions on importing main staple crops (rice) could lead to higher prices, hindering efforts to achieve Zero Hunger; however, in practice this may not be very impactful, as Bangladesh is nearly self-sufficient in rice in many years. Tariffs on equipment and inputs used for food fortification (such as a 15% customs duty on iodine for iodising salt) can increase the costs of these nutritious foods. However, trade policies were highly coherent with food loss and waste reduction through provisions to reduce food loss and waste during import and export (e.g., cold chain measures, appropriate packaging), having high-quality trade facilitation measures in place (e.g., digital customs processing), and ratification of World Trade Organisation Trade Facilitation Agreements aiming to expedite movement and clearance of goods along the supply chain.

Conclusion

There are some caveats to this analysis. First, this application was conducted at the national level. Relevant division-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 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, Bangladesh'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: