



MONITORING FOOD SYSTEMS in Zambia

KEY MESSAGES

- Zambia has established sector-specific food systems policies and institutional coordination through the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC) under the Ministry of Health.
- The recent development of a national Food Systems Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (2024) represents a critical opportunity to harmonise indicators across ministries and guide the implementation of the national pathway and evidence-based decision-making for transformation goals.
- Future revisions of Zambia's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework would benefit from strategic additions of outcome-based indicators in environment and resilience thematic areas to complement existing process-based indicators.
- Integration across sectors will be fundamental to a comprehensive analysis of food system interactions and evidence for cross-sector policy decisions.

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Introduction

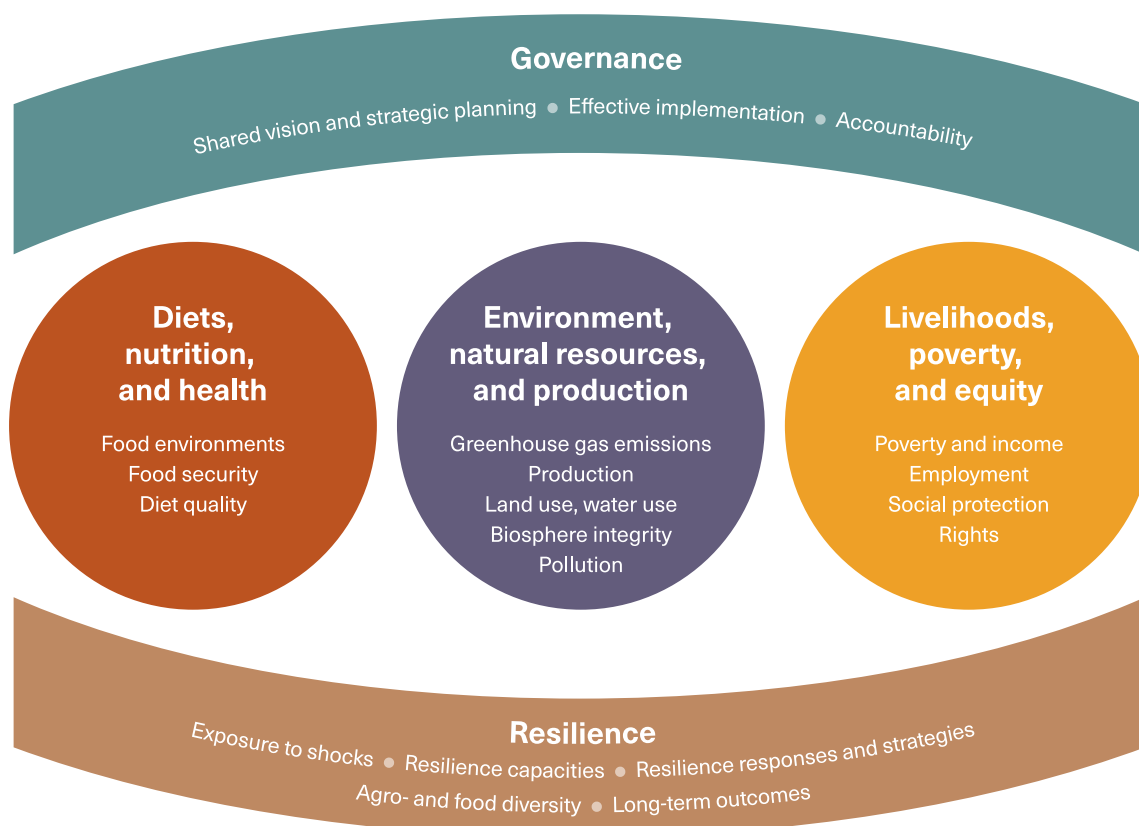
Zambia has demonstrated strong political commitment to food systems transformation while grappling with persistent systemic vulnerabilities that threaten progress toward sustainable food and nutrition security. As a landlocked country in southern Africa with a population largely dependent on climate-sensitive smallholder agriculture, Zambia faces the urgent imperative to build resilience while addressing deep-rooted challenges of malnutrition, poverty, and environmental degradation.

Around 80% of low-income Zambians live in rural areas and rely primarily on farming, livestock, and other agricultural work, and close to 60% of Zambians are employed in agriculture, with 1.65 million farms, which are primarily rain-fed.¹ Agricultural production in Zambia is dominated by maize (50% of total area planted), despite increasing opportunities in other value chains.² Ninety percent of farmers are smallholders

who cultivate less than 5 hectares using hand-based tools.¹ Zambia's agricultural sector is highly vulnerable to climate shocks, as demonstrated by the 2024 El Niño-induced drought that affected 84 of Zambia's 116 districts, resulting in widespread crop failure, disruptions in livelihoods, and food insecurity for an estimated 5.8 million people.³

Zambia has responded to these challenges with comprehensive policy frameworks anchored by the Eighth National Development Plan (2022-2026)⁴ and Vision 2030, which positions food and nutrition security as central to economic transformation and human development. The country's engagement in the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit resulted in a national pathway for food systems transformation, developed following a process of coordination and dialogue led by the National Convenor under the Office of the Vice President. This pathway outlined five priority

Countdown themes and indicator groups. Outer shapes refer to cross-cutting themes. Interior circles refer to long-term outcomes.



1 World Bank. Zambia Country Economic Memorandum 2024. The World Bank Group, Washington D.C. June 2024.

2 Ministry of Agriculture and ZamStats. 2022/2023 Crop Forecast Survey Results Presentation. Lusaka: Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats), 2023.

3 United Nations Children's Fund. UNICEF Zambia Annual Report 2024. UNICEF, New York, February 2025.

4 Republic of Zambia. Eighth National Development Plan 2022-2026. Available from: <https://www.cabinet.gov.zm/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/8NDP-2022-2026.pdf>



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areas: ensuring access to safe and nutritious food, promoting sustainable consumption, enhancing nature-positive production, advancing equitable livelihoods, and building resilience to shocks.

Zambia's institutional architecture for food systems governance centers on the National Food and Nutrition Commission, which coordinates multisectoral efforts across Ministries of Agriculture; Fisheries and Livestock; Health; Education; Community Development and Social Services; Green Economy and Environment; and Commerce, Trade, and Industry, among others. This coordination model has facilitated the development of cornerstone programmes, including the Farmer Input Support Program, Home-Grown School Feeding Program, and Social Cash Transfer Scheme, which collectively address different components of the food system from production to access and utilisation. A critical milestone in Zambia's transformation journey is the recent development of a comprehensive Food Systems Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in 2024 through the Food Systems Technical Working Group (FSTWG). This framework represents the first systematic attempt to further operationalise the national pathway, harmonise indicators across sectors, and align national monitoring with global frameworks including the Sustainable Development Goals. As Zambia operationalises its national framework, an important opportunity exists to align with global monitoring initiatives while ensuring indicators meet local priorities. This alignment offers opportunities to strengthen evidence-based decision-making and accountability, as well as tracking progress towards transformation outcomes. This policy brief examines the current state of food systems monitoring in Zambia and offers recommendations for strengthening the Food Systems Monitoring and Evaluation Framework with additional indicators to support transformative change.

The Food Systems Countdown Initiative

The Food Systems Countdown Initiative emerged from the United Nations Food Systems Summit as an interdisciplinary collaboration that now includes over 65 food systems experts from dozens of institutions worldwide. The Countdown developed a global monitoring framework, comprising five themes: (1) Diets, nutrition, and health; (2) Environment, natural resources, and production; (3) Livelihoods, poverty, and equity; (4) Governance; and (5) Resilience. It then undertook a consultative process to select a set of 50 indicators across these themes, which constitutes the global indicator framework. The Countdown publishes annual monitoring updates and additional analysis in an effort to monitor global food systems transformation. The Countdown's global indicator framework is being adapted at the country level to meet local needs and priorities.

Framework Convergence and Fundamental Differences in Monitoring

A systematic comparison of Zambia's Food Systems Monitoring and Evaluation Framework with the Countdown's global monitoring framework reveals both considerable convergence and fundamental differences in coverage of thematic areas and indicator types that shape each framework's ability to support different aspects of food systems transformation.

Zambia's framework uses an input-and process-based approach, with numerous indicators measuring policy development, programme establishment, and institutional coordination, which provides an action plan to the government and stakeholders to implement the national pathway. In comparison, the Countdown focuses on an outcomes approach across most thematic groups that helps guide countries on

the achievement of global goals and commitments. For example, while Zambia tracks the number of farmers adopting climate-smart practices, it provides limited measurement of whether these practices improve resilience (e.g., minimum species diversity) or environmental (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions) outcomes. Similarly, extensive monitoring of financial access and infrastructure development lacks corresponding indicators of livelihood improvements, such as female landownership.

In addition to differing approaches, there are some conceptual differences between Zambia's Food Systems Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the Countdown, particularly in environment (greenhouse gas emissions, cropland changes, nitrogen use efficiency, fisheries health index), governance (health-related food environment policies), and resilience (coping strategies, food price volatility, food supply variability) thematic areas. Zambia's framework demonstrates several areas of comprehensive coverage that reflect important contextual priorities and implementation needs, which are not reflected in the Countdown. For example, Zambia includes the Global Food Loss Index for systematic post-harvest loss measurement, complemented by detailed food processing infrastructure monitoring, including the number of operational agro-processing plants and facilities compliant with Good Manufacturing Practices standards, and the proportion of facilities using primary, secondary, and traditional processing methods. This comprehensive approach to food loss and processing reflects critical priorities for improving food system efficiency in a context where post-harvest losses significantly impact food security. In addition, Zambia's framework incorporates multiple indicators tracking diets and nutrition, as well as knowledge transfer and behaviour change that are absent from the Countdown, including the percentage of individuals receiving nutrition training and sensitisation in the past 12 months, and pre-service training in schools implementing nutritional programmes. These indicators reflect Zambia's emphasis on building population-level nutrition knowledge as a foundation for dietary improvement.



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Recommendations for Future Monitoring

Zambia's current action-oriented framework, while strong in tracking agricultural inputs and practices, policy existence and governance establishment, and downstream outcomes on diets and health, faces critical limitations in outcome measurement across environment and resilience thematic areas. The process-based indicator selection reflects Zambia's current institutional development phase but may limit the framework's utility for assessing transformation results and informing policies. Without alignment to globally monitored environmental outcome indicators such as greenhouse gas emissions, cropland area change, and functional integrity, Zambia cannot assess whether its agricultural investments achieve sustainability goals, for example, net-zero emissions, alongside productivity targets. Similarly, the emphasis on policy process indicators without corresponding outcome measures limits understanding of intervention effectiveness and constrains evidence-based policy refinement. Zambia's framework would benefit from strategic additions of outcome indicators that complement existing process measures, enabling comprehensive assessment of whether institutional strengthening and policy development translate into measurable food systems transformation results.