Political Economy Decision Toolkit

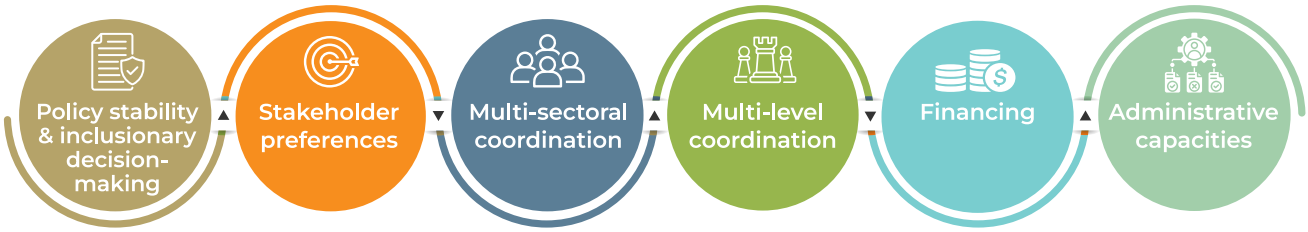
Africa regional focus

What is the tool and why is it needed?

Political economy dynamics, namely the conflicts and trade-offs across different interest groups, permeate decisions about food systems policy design and implementation. Development practitioners and policymakers working to positively transform food systems – through changes to agriculture, nutrition, environment, and elsewhere – need to be alive to these dynamics in order to support policy advocacy, development, and implementation.

The Political Economy Decision Toolkit (PEDT) has been developed to help stakeholders to anticipate policy bottlenecks to food systems transformation. It encompasses six domains within national policy systems (**Figure 1**): policy stability and inclusionary decision-making, stakeholder preferences, multi-sectoral coordination, multi-level coordination, financing, and administrative capacities..

Figure 1. Six domains in the Political Economy Decision Toolkit



The toolkit includes components making up these domains and offers metrics that can help to assess them. It provides examples of how to aggregate the metrics, as well as examples of best practices for tackling political economy constraints uncovered using the toolkit.

USER TIPS

Using a Political Economy Decision Toolkit can help policymakers and other food systems stakeholders to understand:

- Six key domains where political economy factors matter to food systems policy;
- Political economy dynamics that might derail progress towards a common policy agenda;
- Constraints that are likely to arise and interventions that might prevent or overcome them

Find the full set of briefs | The Food Systems Countdown to 2030 Initiative | The Food Systems Dashboard | Diet Quality Questionnaire | Diagnosing Food Systems Policy Coherence | Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) | The Political Economy Decision Toolkit | Innovative Finance for Food Systems Transformation

How to find and use the Political Economy Decision Toolkit

The PEDT (3) is a document available to download from the GAIN website[1].

Several metrics are covered under each of PEDT's six domains. **Figure 2** illustrates the 32 questions covered. Accessing these through the full toolkit highlights examples of best practices for tackling political economy constraints, offering guidance to practitioners on where and how to target their 'politically smart' engagement strategies with country partners.

Figure 2. Six domains in the Political Economy Decision Toolkit

Domain 1 — Stability and Inclusion domain

1A	Are there institutionalised constraints on the executive's decision-making powers?
1B	What is the likelihood that the government will be destabilised?
1C	How frequently have ministers in the relevant food system policy domain changed, on average, in the last 5 years?
1D	What is the likelihood of upcoming electoral turnover?
1E	Are there restrictions on associational and organisational rights?
1F	Are there restrictions on freedom of expression and belief?
1G	Are there modalities for public participation in food system-related policies?

Domain 2 — Stakeholder Preferences domain

2A	Who has decision-making power with respect to the relevant food systems policy?
2B	Who has influential power with respect to the relevant food systems policy?
2C	What are the preferences of the stakeholders with decision making and influential powers?

Domain 3 — Multi-sectoral Collaboration domain

3A	Is there a coordinating body that has been established for the relevant food system policy?
3B	Where is the coordinating body for implementation housed?
3C	How many ministries belong to the coordinating body?
3D	Have clear functions been delineated among coordinating members for information exchange and reporting with regards to the relevant food system policy?
3E	Have clear functions been delineated among coordinating members for accountability for performance, with regards to the relevant food system policy?
3F	Is the body sufficiently financed and staffed?
3G	Are there well-recognised institutional hierarchies or conflicts across key agencies/ ministries?
3H	Are there divergent policy mandates / goals across key ministries / agencies that impede coordination?

1 Link to download it here https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.43

Domain 4	**Multi-level Collaboration domain**	
	4A	Are mandates clearly defined by tier for relevant food system responsibilities?
	4B	Are there existing inter-governmental coordinating mechanisms
	4C	Are there existing inter-governmental coordinating mechanisms related to the relevant food system policy?
	4D	If federal, how pronounced is vertically divided authority at the state/ provincial level? If unitary, how pronounced is vertically divided authority at city level?
	4E	Are there other related food system policies at the subnational tier?
Domain 5	**Financing domain**	
	5A	To what degree is the macroeconomic environment a concern for implementing the food systems policy?
	5B	Are there diverging donor initiatives in the food system?
	5C	To what degree is there transparency over the budget?
	5D	Is the relevant food system policy costed with a clear plan for resource mobilisation?
	5E	Is there a multi-sectoral budgeting mechanism in place?
	5F	Are there formula-based inter-governmental transfer rules?
Domain 6	**Administrative Capacities domain**	
	6B	What is the overall level of skill and competency in the public sector?
	6C	Are there enough existing staff, sufficiently trained in the appropriate skills, for implementation of the relevant food system policy?
	6D	To what degree are staff insulated from political interference while performing their jobs?

Source: Compiled from (3)

For each of these diagnostic questions, the PEDT provides a way to measure and code responses with a score from 1 (less enabling environment) to 3 (more enabling environment). One advantage of this scoring approach is that it can highlight not only where bottlenecks are most pronounced across the six domains but also among the metrics within each domain.

For a scoring example, consider question 1C about ministerial turnover. The PEDT suggests operatialising this by determining which ministries are relevant for the food system and how often they have collectively changed leadership on average in the previous five years. It suggests the use of secondary sources, such as WhoGovs dataset[2] on worldwide cabinet ministers since 1966. The expectation is that more turnovers lead to less continuity in policy decisions and uptake, while the scoring proposed is: 1 – for an average of 3 or higher ministers; 2 – for an average between 2-3 ministers; and 3 – for an average of less than 2 ministers.

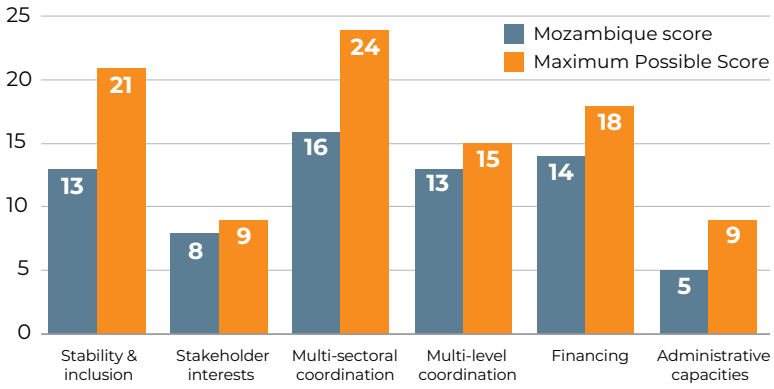
The full toolkit provides examples of how to aggregate the metrics, with an application to Mozambique, determined in early 2024, provided. Mozambique offers a useful case study for providing a concrete application of how the different domains can be assessed. In the wake of the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, the Government of Mozambique (GoM) has been more accepting of the need for greater integration in its approach to the three main food system priorities: sustainable food and nutrition security for all, improved value chains, and resilience to shocks and climate change. These priorities are addressed in different policies and programmes currently underway, including the third version of the National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security (Estratégia de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional, ESAN, 2023-2030). The ESAN III was the focus for the applied analysis of the PEDT. Detailed data is available in the full

2 Housed at https://politicscentre.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/whogov-dataset/

toolkit, but the overall assessment for Mozamibique, combining the metrics in the six domains, highlights where technical partners supporting Mozambique's ESANIII, as well as other food policy initiatives, may encounter different types of political constraints and opportunities. Figure 3 captures the overall picture. The larger the gap between the two bars, the more that domain poses a binding constraint for ESANIII.

This indicates stakeholder interests and multi-level coordination are the least problematic; the latter is likely because Mozambique remains relatively deconcentrated, so subnational entities have minimal policy autonomy to forge their own food and nutrition security approaches.

Figure 3. Assessment of Mozambique across Domains compared to Maximum Possible Scores



By contrast, concerns about policy stability, especially in an election year, multi-sectoral coordination via SETSAN[3] (which is embedded in the agricultural ministry and lacks authority), and insufficient administrative capacities represent the most binding constraints. In some cases, such as regarding policy stability, technical partners may not be able to directly influence the domain but can at least strategize to anticipate its impact on programming. In other cases, such as multi-sectoral coordination, technical partners could identify what types of other institutional modalities might be more effective to address SETSAN's current weaknesses.

Conclusions

The six different modules and corresponding metrics of the PEDT can be used in combination to uncover the largest political economy constraints, or they can be used on their own if practitioners prefer to focus on a particular challenge.

Another advantage of the toolkit is that, for some of the metrics, the domains cannot be scored until a particular analytical component is completed, such as a circle of influence graphic of stakeholder preferences (diagnostic question 2C) or a landscape mapping of relevant donor initiatives (diagnostic question 5B). As such, this leads to the production of additional outputs that can be used for policy planning and engagement as well as for identifying valuable partnerships to advance food systems policy implementation.

The PEDT also shares examples of good practices for tackling political economy constraints – for example, on how to promote budget transparency for food systems. These examples allow practitioners to begin to proactively address some of the bottlenecks uncovered with the toolkit. The toolkit should offer users a practical way to understand and grapple with political economy dynamics as they work to further food systems transformation.

References

Resnick, D. Political Economy for Food Systems Pathways: A New Decision Toolkit. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and International Food Policy Research Institute. Working Paper #43. Geneva, Switzerland, 2024. DOI: https://doi.org/10.36072/wp.43

Resnick, D. Political economy decision toolkit for food systems pathways – in brief. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). Briefing Paper #12. Geneva, Switzerland, 2024. DOI: https://doi.org/10.36072/bp.12

3 Mozambique's Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition