

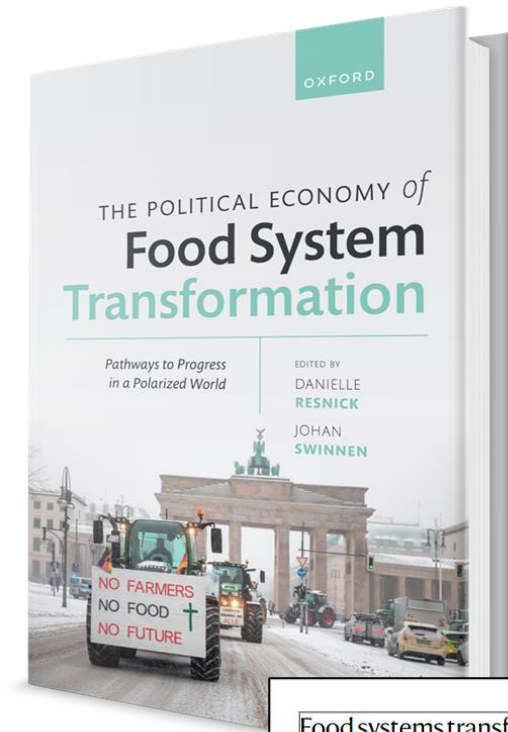
Food Systems Governance: Bangladesh in Comparative Perspective

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Challenges of Food System Governance

- More actors, interests, and coalitions in agricultural value chains
- Food systems are not only tied to livelihoods, production, and nutrition but climate action, sovereignty, gender, race, and rights
- Growth in transnational movements that rely on frames that mobilize very disparate groups and shift traditional agricultural lobbying
- Lack of accountability mechanisms to ensure governments uphold their food system commitments



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Food systems transformation requires strategic attention to political economy

Food systems must go through a fundamental transformation if they are to become environmentally sustainable, generate nutritional benefits and improve economic equity¹. Yet, departing from status quo policies requires elevating political economy considerations within food system analyses, especially in an increasingly polarized world facing more and more expectations about what food systems can and should achieve. Such considerations include, but are not limited to, the distribution of costs and benefits to disparate groups from needed policy changes and the power those groups possess in local, national and global policy processes.

A recently proposed framework² can help orient political economy considerations within food system policy processes (Fig. 1). This framework can be applied to issues as diverse as repurposing agricultural subsidies, reducing red and processed meat consumption, increasing uptake of appropriate biotechnologies and adopting sugar-sweetened beverage taxes. It foremost stresses that policymakers need to be realistic about stakeholders' incentive structures to avoid imperiling a transformation agenda, involving questions such as who stands to gain or to lose the most, are they motivated by interests or ideology, and are institutions ready to mediate different constituencies' concerns and amplify different actors' voices?

Probing incentive structures uncovers when and under which conditions certain reforms are more feasible. For instance, incentives driven by interests can be addressed more easily than those driven by ideas. Indeed, opposition to sugar-sweetened beverage taxes may be more feasible to overcome with earmarks for health services when consumers are concerned about costs than when they hold deep-seated notions about autonomy of individual choice.

Incentive structures affect the nature and tools for policy mobilization, which in turn is often driven by coalitions. Some coalitions are focused along agricultural value chains, others link food systems to cross-issue concerns such as environmental justice or human rights, and still others operate transnationally. Large coalitions with diverse constituencies can be effective at propelling change but, if constituent members support similar policies for very different reasons, they are prone to fracture over time. One example is the "strange bedfellows" coalition of farmers and environmentalists in the 2000s around biofuel adoption in the United States³. In transnational coalitions, activists from the Global North can offer resources and visibility to their partners in the Global South. However, the credibility of transnational coalition partners when they are perceived as advocating policy positions that fail to resonate with local populations. Efforts by transnational coalitions to push Zambian decision-makers to shift from targeting child stunting to expanding dietary diversity offer a case in point⁴.

Moreover, the tactics employed by coalitions define how consensual or contentious an issue becomes. For instance, aggressive protests by farmers over nitrogen emission targets have emerged in recent years in Europe, Canada and New Zealand and are increasingly intertwined with partisan politics⁵. By contrast, deliberative approaches such as those used by Ireland's Citizens' Assembly for advancing climate-friendly agriculture amass different stakeholders over multiple days to identify common positions. While the former exacerbates polarization among relevant constituencies, the latter can be costly and time-consuming.

The degree of contention and consensus shapes viable policy design options. Bundling different technical innovations together to gain buy-in from powerful constituencies is one technique to enlarge options over contentious policy issues, like genetically engineered crops⁶. For example, the adoption in 2013 of its first in Bangladesh – but not in India, for which it was first developed – was facilitated by a confluence of seed and labeling innovations that aligned the interests of the country's ministries of agriculture, finance and environment. Packaging, which combines different tax, regulatory, labelling and information instruments, likewise has shown important potential in survey experiments focused on consumer willingness to reduce red meat consumption⁷. Since policy interventions ultimately need to be prioritized, sequencing is another important element of policy design; if initial interventions are poorly executed, such as subsidy repurposing that neither improves environmental outcomes nor compensates vulnerable farmers, the public can lose confidence in the entire reform process. However, bundling, packaging and sequencing can foster path dependencies over time that can be difficult to unravel when circumstances change.

Fig. 1 | Political economy considerations for food systems transformation. Policymakers must consider stakeholders' incentive structures to avoid imperiling the transformation agenda². Adapted from ref. 2, with permission of the Licensor through PL Scisearch.

nature food

Diverse global fora have discussed SDG2 since 2015



- >20 global events where SDG 2 has been discussed since 2015
- >50% are UN events
- Events are mostly annual
- >100 commitment/decision documents analyzed against a framework for scaling up impact

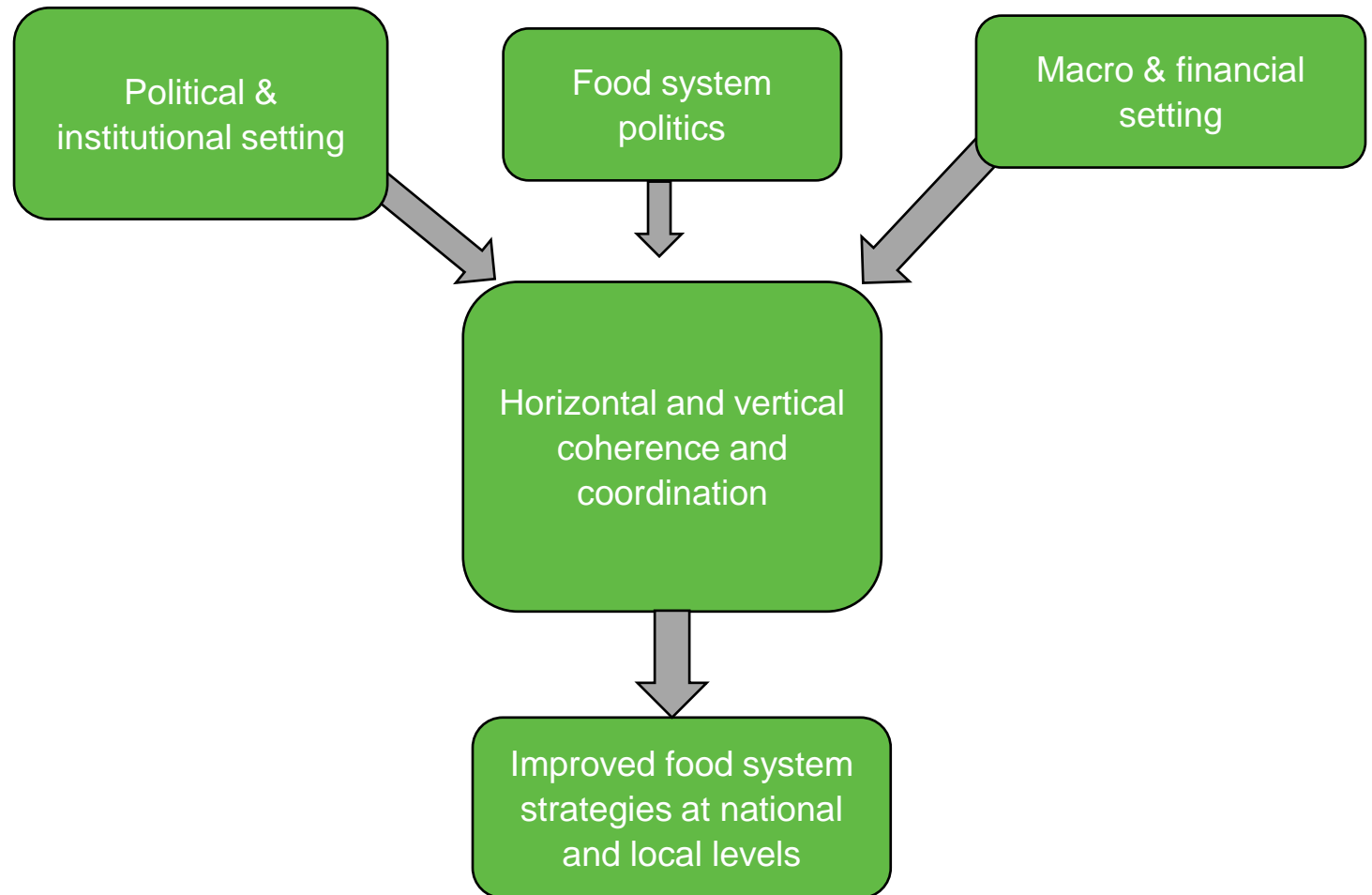
Global commitments fail to incorporate accountability

	Vision aligned with SDG2 goals?	Strategy/ means of implementation	Governance	Financing	Monitoring	Accountability
G20 2023	Yes	Include more partners in G20 (African Union), agricultural innovations, fair trade	Support WHO, be more inclusive	Yes – Call on financial institutions, Working Group	AMIS	WEAK
G7 2023	Yes	Partnerships, assistance \$, R & D, development \$, fair trade, donor coordination, food production	Coordinate UN and donors, nutrition-sensitive policies	Yes – financial institutions, development banks & funds	AMIS, World Bank FNS dashboard	WEAK
UNPF 2023	Yes	National policy plans, localised actions, cooperation and partnership	Paris Agreement (COP) & Addis Ababa Action Agenda (financing development)	Yes – 14 actions	2024 UNPF & Summit of the Future	WEAK
COP 2023	Yes	Partnerships and innovations (e.g., farmer empowerment), capacity building, finance, trade	No (enhance coordination between parties)	Yes – Financial bodies (e.g., Special Climate Change Fund)	Annual report	WEAK

What are challenges to implementing national commitments?

- Insights from semi-structured interviews conducted in May-June 2023 with policy experts in 9 Asian and African countries about the national food system pathways commitments

Factors Influencing Food System Implementation



Horizontal Coordination – Two main approaches

Country	Food System Convenor	Pros	Cons
Bangladesh	Ministry of Food (18 ministries)	An agriculture or food ministry lead will likely have a high level of technical knowledge and connections with different value chain actors	An agriculture or food ministry lead may lack authority with other ministries and fail to adopt a truly food systems perspective
Ethiopia	Ministry of Agriculture & Ministry of Health		
Kenya	Agriculture Transformation Office		
Mozambique	Ministry of Agriculture		
Pakistan	Ministry of National Food Security & Research		
Tanzania	Ministry of Agriculture		
India	Niti Aayog	A planning or budget ministry lead can better ensure coherence and multi-sectoral budget allocations, as well as bypass ministerial jealousies	A planning or budget ministry lead may be viewed as lacking sufficient technical knowledge and usurping other ministries' domains of influence; may reproduce siloes internally
Indonesia	National Development Planning Agency		
Nigeria	Ministry of Finance, Budget, & National Planning		

Bangladesh's Food System Commitments

- **Several guiding documents:**

- National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2020)
- Plan of Action (2021-2030)
- 3rd Country Investment Plan (CIP3) for Sustainable, Nutrition-Sensitive & Resilient Food Systems (2021-2025)
- Articles 15.1 and 18.1 of constitution

- **2021 UNFSS food systems pathway document prioritized:**

- sustainable intensification, diversification, emissions reduction, and increased resilience of production;
- improving human and social capital of especially women and youth;
- targeted social safety nets for the poor and vulnerable;
- addressing harvest and post-harvest losses

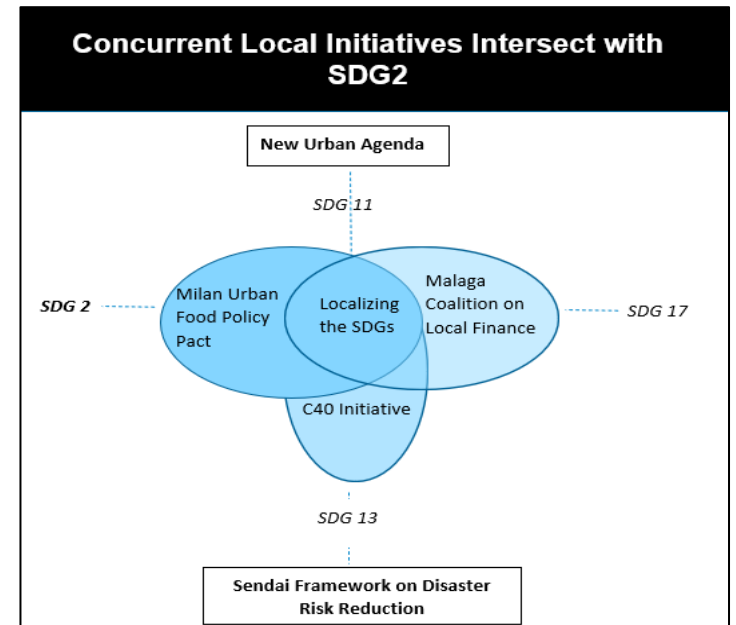
- **In 2023 UNFSS stocktaking, PM offered 5 additional proposals** for food systems, encompassing financial incentives, trade, technology, food banks, anti-waste social movement

Vertical coherence

- Decentralization and devolution revolutions in many parts of the world over the last 20 years
 - **Local governments have more political authority** and functional responsibilities, including in the food system
 - May have **contentious relationships with national governments** that affect resource transfers, especially in contexts of “vertically-divided authority”
 - May **lack bureaucratic capacities** for complex food system planning



Source: C40 Initiative



Source: Resnick (2023)

Vertical coherence

- Expected urban population of about **46% by 2030 due to rapid urbanization**, often driven by climate-induced internal displacement
 - Places huge pressure on urban food systems and employment creation
- **Dhaka Food Agenda 2041** guided by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives and 4 city corporations
 - Unclear how incorporated into national food system strategies
 - How will intergovernmental resources be allocated
 - How to better support the country's secondary cities and towns to mitigate spatial food system inequalities

Dhaka's markets provide fresh fruits and vegetables for 95% of the urban poor



Picture by WFP

Financing

- In 2017, Bangladesh's SDG financing strategy indicated **annual shortfall of USD 66.3 billion** to meet SDG implementation between 2017-2030
 - Shortfalls in financing since exacerbated by Covid-19 and Ukraine war
 - Concerns about US sanctions response in relation to 2024 elections
 - However, still at low risk of debt distress
- Financing in the Annual Development Program for the 8th Five Year Plan (2021-2025) allocated resources for health, agriculture, social security and welfare, environment and climate change, and industrial and economic services
 - Key to identify **how these sectoral finances are coordinated** for food systems expenditures
 - Potential trade-offs with SDG approach
- **Different donor interpretations of “food systems” and priorities**, which undermines harmonization

Conclusions

- Food systems perspective reflects a more accurate recognition of **diverse intersections** and a more holistic understanding of **trade-offs and synergies**
 - But **complex for policy implementation** from an institutional and financing perspective
- **Bangladesh has several strengths**, including long-standing commitment to food and nutrition outcomes and Ministry of Food
 - **Many commitments and goals** that are difficult to manage across sectors
 - Diverse and **uneven efforts at the subnational level**
- Important to
 - **Maintain momentum across elections**, including by consistent training of those involved in budget making processes
 - Invest in **mechanisms of national accountability** to track financing and actions