



# Implementing National Food Systems Pathways: Emerging Practices

July 2025



Funded by  
the European Union

Cover photograph: © FAO/Bradley Secker

**Türkiye – Fikriye Şeyma Uçar (Center) fixes fishing nets with other female workers at the Arsuz port in the southern Turkish port of Hatay.**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was developed by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, with the substantive contribution of the Agrifood Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as part of the project *Accelerating Food Systems Transformation through a Scalable Success Model*, funded by the European Union. It builds on previous work funded by the EU from 2021 to 2023, in the run up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4), of 27-29 July 2025 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The document highlights emerging good practices in operationalizing food systems transformation pathways from some 20 countries, and from the wider evidence gathered by the Hub through National Voluntary Progress reports, national dialogues and interviews with National Convenors since 2022. While intended to serve a broad global audience, it also provides a timely and practical resource for countries participating in the EU-funded project *Accelerating Food Systems Transformation Through a Scalable Success Model*, supporting peer-to-peer learning and experience-sharing—helping them identify successful implementation models that may be adapted to their own contexts.

The document benefitted from the collaborative efforts of the Task Force for Successful National Food Systems Pathways Implementation. The Task Force brings together a wide array of partners, whose engagement and contributions have been vital. These include the Agroecology Coalition, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Coalition, and the Rome-based agencies—FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Special recognition goes to the eight countries that are part of the European Union-funded project *Accelerating Food Systems Transformation through a Scalable Success Model*, whose active engagement in the Task Force has informed and strengthened this work: Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Kiribati, Madagascar, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, and Zambia.

We also thank the National Convenors and technical teams from the 23 countries, the Sahel region and the Asia and the Pacific Regional Food and Nutrition Taskforce, whose good practices are highlighted: Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Uganda.

## CHAPTER 1

# PAVING THE WAY TO FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

While food availability has improved in recent decades, food systems still struggle to deliver adequate nutrition and secure fair livelihoods for all. By 2023, 735 million people faced hunger, with over 295 million across 53 countries experiencing crisis-level hunger—a 5 percent rise from the previous year<sup>1</sup>—and more than 3.1 billion could not afford a healthy diet. Meanwhile, more than 2.8 billion adults were overweight or obese, reflecting the triple burden of malnutrition. Many food systems workers also face food insecurity and poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, food systems generate one-third of global emissions, 80 percent of biodiversity loss, and 70 percent of freshwater withdrawals<sup>3,4</sup>. They are also vulnerable to environmental degradation and climate extremes. Protracted conflicts, climate shocks, economic stress, and public health threats<sup>1</sup> interact to undermine food systems. These interactions make it imperative to adopt systems approaches, acknowledging the deep interdependence between food systems and issues such as health, climate, trade, livelihoods, and equity.

Food systems, as defined by FAO (2018, adapted), embrace “the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal (loss or waste) of food products and the broader economic, societal, and physical environments, in which they are embedded.”

<sup>1</sup> **GRFC. 2025.** *Global Report on Food Crises 2025*. Rome, FSIN and GNAFC. <https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2025/> en.wikipedia.org+7openknowledge.fao.org+7weforum.org+7reddit.com+1reddit.com+1

<sup>2</sup> **FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2024.** *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024*. Rome, FAO. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/ebe19244-9611-443c-a2a6-25cec697b361> openknowledge.fao.org+1openknowledge.fao.org+1

<sup>3</sup> **Crippa, M., et al. 2021.** *Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions*. *Nature Food*, 2, pp. 198–209. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>

<sup>4</sup> **FAO. 2021.** *Contribution of agri-food systems to emissions and environmental impact*. Rome, FAO.



This definition requires acknowledging and responding to the intricate web of actors, drivers, and outcomes within food systems, highlighting both their essential role in sustaining life and livelihoods and the profound consequences when they fall short.

Recognizing the urgency of transforming food systems, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General convened the **2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) as a pivotal moment to catalyze bold, systemic transformations**. The Summit drove the narrative that food systems are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda and stressed the importance of inclusive approaches that engage governments, civil society, private sector actors, Indigenous Peoples, youth, and traditionally marginalized communities throughout solution design and delivery.

In response to this global call, countries conducted dialogues and formulated **national food systems pathways**—policy frameworks that define the national vision and strategic priorities for transforming their food systems—as a means to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To support countries in formulating and operationalizing their pathways, the **UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (the Hub)** – hosted by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) - was established in 2022, serving as an inter-agency coordination structure on behalf of the UN system. The Hub has since played a central role in supporting member states, providing technical assistance, brokering partnerships, channelling funding, facilitating peer learning, and promoting inclusive governance structures. Through country engagement and coordinated support, the Hub helps countries sustain momentum beyond the UNFSS process and embed food systems thinking into their long-term development planning.

During the **2023 UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS+2)**, the Secretary-General launched a *Call to Action* reinforcing six shared priorities: embedding food systems strategies into national policies, strengthening governance, investing in innovation and data, ensuring participatory implementation, enhancing business accountability, and unlocking finance and investments.

↓ Afghanistan – Noor Ahmad and his children are sitting together and eating bread.  
© FAO/Hashim Azizi





↑ Tajikistan – Seller arranging tomatoes at the local market Mehrgon.  
© FAO/Nozim Kalandarov

Regional stocktakes, national dialogues, and countries' voluntary progress reports on the national food systems pathways reveal **several common constraints across countries in the development and operationalization of these pathways**. These include sustaining momentum and multistakeholder engagement beyond the Summit, translating high-level visions into costed and actionable strategies, and ensuring alignment between pathway priorities and sectoral or local planning processes. Financing remains a persistent constraint, from assessing needs to mobilizing, allocating, and tracking resources. Governance fragmentation and siloed institutional mandates limit coordination across ministries and sectors. Data gaps, weak monitoring systems, and limited institutional mechanisms for iterative learning further slow adaptation and delivery<sup>5,6</sup>.

These constraints reflect structural barriers that require a combination of technical solutions, political commitment, institutional innovations, and tailored support at the national and sub-national levels.

Targeting National Convenors and senior policymakers, **this document contributes to national and global efforts to address persistent implementation bottlenecks**, offering practical guidance, tools, and country examples to help translate national food systems pathways into measurable outcomes.

The document is structured to follow the practical arc of the food systems national pathways, from the development and formulation of the document, informed by national dialogues, to exploring the key enablers of implementation.

Drawing on countries' experiences, this document promotes **country-to-country learning**, illustrating how common challenges are being addressed and providing entry points for adaptation.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations. Forthcoming. *Report of the Secretary-General: UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake*. Rome, United Nations.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub (UNFSCH). 2025. *Questionnaire on Voluntary Review on Food Systems Transformation at country level, UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake*. Rome, FAO.



## CHAPTER 2

# VISION, DEVELOPMENT, AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE NATIONAL PATHWAY

Since the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), 155 countries have appointed a national convenor and engaged in the UNFSS process. While 128 countries have defined their food systems transformation vision through formal national pathway documents, others have embedded their vision within existing strategies, policies, and plans.

By 2024, over 70 percent of countries had integrated their national pathway vision into development strategies or sectoral plans<sup>7</sup>. This growing alignment signals increasing political will. However, fundamental transformation requires more than commitment—it needs coherent leadership, robust institutions, and sustained engagement with those most affected by food systems. When effectively developed and applied, national pathways can serve as the foundation for this transformation.

**This document supports the development and operationalization of pathways** and other food systems commitments, primarily targeting countries that have dedicated pathway documents. It recognizes that countries engage with their pathways in different ways: some treat them as central frameworks, integrated into sectoral, national and local planning; others use them as a high-level vision to implement through existing food security and nutrition policies and strategies, national development plans, or other sectoral policies. It also recognises that some countries have yet to develop a pathway document or are using alternative approaches.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub (UNFSCH). 2024. *Synthesis Report on National Pathway Implementation Progress*. Rome, FAO.



**Pathways are not static plans;** they are living documents that evolve in response to shifting national contexts, new evidence, and iterative dialogue. Their role is to guide action and coordination across ministries, sectors, and stakeholders.

**Developing and operationalizing a national food systems pathway is not a one-off exercise**—it is a structured, inclusive, and iterative process that translates vision into coordinated action. Countries that have made the most significant progress typically follow a sequence that begins with broad-based dialogues and proceeds to the formulation of a coherent pathway document, anchored in national policies and plans, and shaped to drive implementation by identifying strengths, gaps, and vulnerabilities, enabling realistic and adaptive operationalization.

The **food systems dialogues** represent the foundational building block for developing inclusive national pathways. The following subsections will first introduce these components—the dialogues and the pathway document—as critical foundations for defining a shared vision and a structured strategy for transforming food systems. It continues by presenting the key means to operationalize the national pathway:

- developing a costed action plan, conducting financing assessments and strategies, tracking food systems budgets and financing, and formulating investment plans;
- converging agendas, integrating and localizing the pathway;
- establishing solid governance mechanisms;
- monitoring and evaluating pathways implementation;
- and regularly reviewing the pathway.

Together, these elements ensure that the pathways remain inclusive, actionable, and adaptive instruments for the sustained transformation of food systems.

↓ Sri Lanka – A farm worker prepares pineapples for harvest as part of efforts to strengthen resilient and sustainable agricultural practices.  
© FAO/David Blacker



## 2.A. FOOD SYSTEM DIALOGUES

**Food systems dialogues** build shared understanding, legitimacy, and political ownership. Grounded in the **2021 UN Food Systems Summit approach** (Figure 1), they foster collaboration across government institutions, civil society, producer organizations, Indigenous Peoples, youth groups, academia, the private sector, UN entities, and development partners. They help align priorities, identify trade-offs, and promote policy integration and collective action.

**FIGURE 1**

### Suggested methodological structure of the food systems summit dialogues

#### Diverse Participation

Inclusive by design, engaging stakeholders from government, civil society, private sector, and more.

#### Structured Format

Includes small-group discussions and summary sessions, guided by prompt questions.

#### Defined Roles

Convenors plan, Curators moderate, and Facilitators ensure inclusive discussion.

#### Vision-Driven Topics

Focus on 2030 food systems visions to identify short-term transformative actions.

#### Actionable Outcomes

Dialogues produce insights, highlighting convergences and divergences for policy input.

Despite the fundamental role of multistakeholder dialogues in shaping and operationalizing the pathways, National Convenors report that they face limited and unpredictable financing for the dialogues, weak institutional anchoring, reliance on external facilitators, insufficient inclusivity, and power imbalances as key bottlenecks. **In some contexts, Convenors lack formal mandates or authority** to convene multi-sectoral processes, making it difficult to sustain momentum and ensure follow-up<sup>5,6</sup>.

**Inclusivity also remains a major concern.** Participation by women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable populations has been inconsistent, especially in sub-national and rural areas. Moreover, dialogue outcomes often fail to translate into concrete policies or investments due to coordination gaps, limited technical capacity, and weak linkages to budgeting<sup>5,6</sup>.

Consultation fatigue, time constraints, and unclear incentives may further limit sustained participation, particularly in contexts with fragmented or repetitive consultation processes<sup>5,6</sup>.

Despite these challenges, **many countries** have **successfully institutionalized dialogue processes**. **Ghana** and **Guatemala**, as part of the project *Supporting National Dialogues to accelerate the transformation towards sustainable, resilient, healthy, and equitable food systems* funded with support from the Denmark government (the Danish Fund), have overcome common barriers—such as weak mandates, fragmented coordination, and limited inclusivity—by anchoring their dialogues in strong institutions, conducting deliberate outreach to marginalized groups, and linking dialogue outcomes to national planning processes. Structured processes, effective political leadership, and targeted external support enable continuity beyond one-off events.

These cases demonstrate that well-defined mandates, strategic and sustained financing, and local institutional ownership are key to translating food systems dialogues into long-term mechanisms for alignment, integration, accountability, and systemic change.

## 2.B. PATHWAY DOCUMENT

**A strong pathway document establishes clear priorities, actions, and accountability mechanisms** for transforming food systems, while also guiding operationalization, governance, and alignment with national and global goals. Grounded in sound inter-ministerial food policy analysis, it identifies relevant policies, strengths, trade-offs and gaps, paving the way for integrating the pathway into broader, coherent national policy frameworks.

Yet, many countries report persistent hurdles. Challenges include translating broad ambitions into tailored strategies aligned with country-specific needs, the weak application of systems thinking, limited localized data, and ambiguity regarding the scope of transformation—factors that reduce coherence and policy uptake<sup>5,6</sup>.

Despite these challenges, **several countries have developed compelling pathway documents**, offering valuable insights into what works. Strong pathways are grounded in **inclusive diagnostics, inter-ministerial coordination, and policy coherence**. In-depth food systems assessments, conducted in 49 countries under the **Sustainable Agrifood Systems Transformation Initiative** with the technical and financial support of FAO Investment Centre and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), helped these countries map their food system, identify bottlenecks and levers for transforming their food system, and inform the formulation of their national pathways. Anchoring the pathway in national planning processes helps align food systems transformation with broader and global development goals. Clear institutional roles, investment strategies, and monitoring systems enhance the readiness for implementation. Predictable government leadership and targeted external support—such as the Danish Fund and the United Nations Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund (Joint SDG Fund) food systems window—help translate ambition into structured, state-led delivery. Experiences from countries like **Ethiopia** and **Costa Rica** illustrate how these elements work in practice. Together, these insights highlight that robust pathway documents are more than strategies—they are strategic tools to drive integrated, accountable, and context-responsive cross-sectoral change.

## 2.C. FINANCING THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE PATHWAY

Countries must **ensure their pathways are designed with implementation in mind**, costed, aligned with national budgets, and structured to attract investment. Without this financial foundation, implementation risks stalling.

This section introduces four essential instruments that are key to financing the implementation of pathways: costed action plans, financing assessments and strategies; food systems budget and financing tracking; and investment plans.

Each of these elements plays a distinct role, yet interconnected and mutually reinforcing. While not all countries may develop them sequentially, these represent a comprehensive set of mechanisms that, when collectively employed, increase the likelihood of successfully operationalizing national pathways.

### Four Key Instruments for Financing Pathway Implementation

1. **Costed action plans** translate pathway priorities into concrete, budgeted actions.
2. **Financing assessments and strategies** estimate total resource needs and funding gaps, guiding strategic financing choices.
3. **Tracking food systems budgets and financing** provides the visibility required to understand where public budgets, donor resources, and private capital are allocated across food systems, enabling informed decisions and improved coordination.
4. **Investment plans** package priorities into bankable proposals, ready for resource mobilization.

Across these four areas, countries face persistent barriers, including limited technical capacity to develop costed action plans, a lack of standardized tools for financing assessments, weak visibility on food systems spending across public and donor budgets, and fragmented processes for preparing investment-ready proposals<sup>5,6</sup>.

Despite persisting challenges, a growing number of countries are making progress through both national initiatives and targeted external support.

With support from the Danish Fund and the Startup Fund, several countries have developed detailed costed action plans embedded in national systems. Through the **Financial Flows to Food Systems (3FS)** tool developed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank (WB) with support from the Hub and the FAO Investment Centre's work under the **Sustainable Agrifood Systems Intelligence (SASI)**, many countries have gained new capacity to track spending across sectors and analyze finance for food systems. In parallel, support from global mechanisms, including the Joint SDG Fund, the Green Climate Fund readiness support, and the Global Environment Facility, has helped governments identify investment priorities and prepare fundable, systemic proposals. Together, these efforts demonstrate how coordinated national leadership, and targeted assistance can facilitate the implementation of financing architectures that are ready for use.



## Costed action plan

To operationalize the pathway, countries must translate it into a **costed action plan that links objectives to sequenced activities, assigns institutional responsibilities, aligns priorities with financing, and defines implementation timelines**. These plans serve as a bridge between vision and delivery.

Many countries face significant challenges in developing costed action plans. National Convenors often cite **limited tools and technical capacity for budgeting, weak coordination with finance ministries, and difficulties in aligning resource needs with available funding streams as the major obstacles**<sup>5,6</sup>.

Despite these barriers, some countries have made notable progress; for instance, **Tanzania** and the **Kyrgyz Republic** have developed costed action plans through inclusive processes, strong institutional engagement and catalytic support from the Hub.

**Tanzania**, as part of the Startup Fund<sup>8</sup> project, developed a costed action plan through a government-led multi-sectoral process and successfully aligned it with its national budget systems. The **Kyrgyz Republic**, as part of the Danish Fund project, integrated implementation costing into its action plan. These cases demonstrate how embedding costing and existing budgets within action plans—supported by cross-sector collaboration—can improve coordination and enhance implementation readiness.

The general takeaway is clear: **effective costed action plans are realistic, time-bound, and nationally anchored**. They require clarity of roles, integration with financing systems and budget cycles, and inclusive development. While external support can catalyze progress, sustained leadership and alignment with national systems are what ultimately ensure delivery.

## Financing assessments and strategies

Financing assessments and strategies are essential to operationalizing the pathway. They **estimate total resource and investment needs, identify funding gaps, and define the appropriate mix of public, private, and external financing sources**.

Grounded in real data and cross-sectoral inputs, these assessments enable governments to design feasible and sequenced investment strategies that are responsive to national goals.

Yet, Convenors report recurring challenges: **food systems priorities are often weakly reflected in national financing strategies, integrated frameworks to assess cross-sectoral needs are lacking, and engagement from finance ministries and development banks remains limited**<sup>5,6</sup>.

Nonetheless, progress is possible. The cases of **Indonesia** and **Jordan**, supported respectively by the Startup Fund and the Joint SDG Fund—show how such assessments can inform comprehensive financing strategies aligned with national priorities.

<sup>8</sup> The Startup Fund was funded by three projects: The FAO core funding, the Flexible Multi-partner Mechanism (FMM) funded project *Walking the talk of Food Systems Transformations: Enacting Food Systems for People, Planet and Common Prosperity*, and the Norway funded project *Fast-tracking food system transformation in selected countries through support to national pathways implementation*.



↑ Kenya – A farmer inspects hydroponic crops, reflecting advances in agricultural transformation.  
© FAO/Eduardo Soteras

**Foundational steps include** estimating total investment needs, identifying funding gaps, and mapping funding sources to develop financing strategies tailored to national contexts. For Convenors, this underscores the importance of embedding such assessments early in the implementation process to ensure coherence, feasibility, and fiscal integration across sectors.

When supported by inclusive dialogue, strong leadership, and structured planning, financing assessments help embed food systems priorities into fiscal frameworks and turn ambition into action.

### Tracking food systems budgets and financing

Tracking food systems budgets and financing is a critical means of implementation for operationalizing national pathways. It allows governments to understand where resources—public, private, and external—are currently allocated across the food system. By mapping expenditures, identifying gaps, and flagging inefficiencies, countries can align spending with food systems transformation priorities and improve resource coordination, accountability, and impact.

Yet convenors face recurring challenges. There is **no standardized methodology for tracking expenditures related to food systems. Public financial management systems are often fragmented, and development partner funding is frequently misaligned with national plans or poorly reflected in government systems**<sup>5,6</sup>.

Still, some countries are moving forward. **Kenya** and **Sierra Leone** offer examples of progress, supported respectively by the **3FS tool** and the **FAO Investment Centre**. In **Kenya**, the 3FS tool enabled the government to produce a detailed, cross-sectoral map of food systems spending, which has informed national planning. In **Sierra Leone**, institutional support helped mainstream expenditure tracking within their flagship Feed Salone strategy, enabling cross-ministerial coordination and a clearer view of resource flows across sectors.

**Foundational steps include** establishing methodologies to map expenditures across public and donor budgets, building institutional capacity to track cross-sector flows, and embedding results into planning and budgeting frameworks.

When underpinned by robust tools, institutional support, and political buy-in, budget tracking becomes a practical lever for coherence, transparency, and more effective implementation of national pathways.

## Investment plans

Investment plans are a key instrument for operationalizing national pathways. They translate strategic priorities into structured, costed, and sequenced projects that guide resource mobilization and align financing with national objectives.

**A well-designed investment plan helps governments identify bankable interventions, demonstrate readiness to partners, and connect ambition with delivery.**

However, countries face persistent challenges: few countries have investment-ready pipelines, risk mitigation tools for crowding in private capital remain limited, and policy uncertainty often deters private sector engagement. Coordination between line ministries and finance or planning authorities is also frequently weak<sup>5,6</sup>.

Despite these constraints, progress is emerging. With support from the **Joint SDG Fund**, the **Green Climate Fund's** readiness initiatives, and **FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative**, countries such as **Bhutan** and **Sahel** governments have advanced their strategic, grounded investment planning.

Their success reflects a deliberate approach: beginning with political leadership and institutional clarity, linking food systems to broader development and climate goals, and using spatial targeting and value chain diagnostics to identify high-impact areas.

**Foundational steps** for investment planning include defining institutional roles, aligning interventions with existing policy priorities, sequencing projects based on delivery capacity, and packaging proposals in a form that resonates with public and private financiers.

**Investment planning is not just a technical exercise. It is a governance process that must be country-led, system-embedded, and finance-informed from the outset.** When supported by strong institutions, diagnostic tools, and inclusive planning processes, investment plans become a practical bridge between ambition and financing.

↓ Senegal – Women in the Sahel use rainwater-harvesting cisterns to support year-round gardening, improve food security, and strengthen community resilience.

© Benedicte Kurzen/NOOR for FAO









**Cameroon** and **Thailand**, for instance, show that convergence is not an abstract principle—it is a practical enabler of implementation. **When food systems priorities align with climate, biodiversity, nutrition, and health goals, countries can unlock synergies, reduce inefficiencies, and attract new sources of funding.** Cameroon's experience illustrates how convergence fosters resilience by bridging food and climate agendas. Thailand demonstrates how structured, government-led alignment and whole-of-society engagement institutionalize convergence across national plans and policies. Together, these examples demonstrate that convergence is most effective when it is people-centred, politically supported, and integrated into national systems.

## Integration

**For a food systems transformation pathway to transition from vision to action, it must integrate into the legal, policy, and planning instruments that guide national decision-making.** Without this integration, pathways risk remaining aspirational documents disconnected from implementation.

Integrating a pathway into national frameworks—such as sectoral strategies and policies, development plans, and budgeting instruments—ensures institutional ownership, accountability, and sustainability. It also enables alignment with national investment cycles and delivery mechanisms.

National Convenors report persistent barriers to this process. These include inconsistent integration into sectoral strategies and plans, difficulty harmonizing with existing development priorities, and disruptions caused by political transitions. As a result, food systems goals are not always translated into concrete actions across government<sup>5,6</sup>.

Some countries have successfully navigated these challenges. **Uganda** and **Lebanon** demonstrate that **success hinges on deliberate institutional anchoring, legal alignment, and inclusive engagement.** Uganda used policy gap analysis, broad-based communication, and coordination platforms to embed its pathway into national and sectoral plans. Lebanon, as part of the Danish Fund project, institutionalized transformation by anchoring the Right to Food in national law, linking the pathway with wider legal and policy reforms. These cases confirm that **integration enhances legitimacy, enables alignment with existing planning and budgeting systems, and ensures continuity across political cycles.** Legal frameworks, communication strategies, and high-level leadership are crucial for securing whole-of-government ownership and ensuring long-term delivery.

↓ **Lebanon – Jana Al-Houri, a 19-year-old agriculture student, tends to her own farm, exemplifying youth engagement in sustainable farming.**  
© FAO/Marwan Tahtah





## Localization

**Localizing the implementation of food systems transformation pathways means embedding national ambitions into sub-national policies, planning processes, and budgeting systems.** It empowers municipalities and local institutions to translate the pathway into concrete, place-based actions, ensuring national strategies are informed by and responsive to local priorities. Localization is critical because it enables national food systems strategies to translate into real change by embedding them in local policies, plans, and budgets.

Localization remains one of the most challenging dimensions of implementation. National Convenors report limited involvement of local governments in pathway development, weak sub-national capacities, fragmented coordination, and a lack of localized monitoring and planning tools. These gaps often prevent meaningful alignment between national objectives and local action<sup>5,6</sup>.

Nonetheless, some countries are demonstrating how **localization is strengthened through legal anchoring, targeted capacity building, and structured coordination mechanisms.** **Nepal** and **Timor-Leste** illustrate how food systems transformation is institutionalized at the municipal level through participatory planning, budget alignment, and inclusive governance. **Nepal**, supported by the Startup Fund, demonstrates how constitutional rights, legal anchoring, and structured support can empower municipalities to lead context-specific actions. **Timor-Leste** demonstrates how effective political leadership, community engagement, and integration into local governance systems can create a lasting impact. These experiences confirm that **localization is most effective when legal mandates, multi-actor coordination, and financing converge, transforming ambition into grounded, community-owned delivery.**

↓ **Nepal – Women farmers in Nepal gather at a field school to apply climate-smart practices and lead localized agricultural solutions.**  
© Chris Steele-Perkins/Magnum Photos for FAO



## 2.E. GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

**Governance in food systems refers to the processes and institutions through which public and private actors negotiate priorities, make decisions, and are held accountable** for transforming food systems. It involves managing trade-offs, fostering coordination across sectors and scales, and building accountability among diverse stakeholders<sup>10</sup>.

A critical enabler for operationalizing pathways, effective governance, and coordination is also one of its most persistent challenges. It requires coordinated action across different levels and sectors, ensuring policies and implementation are integrated and coherent. Effective governance involves inclusive, participatory processes where all stakeholders, including marginalized groups, have a voice, promoting a shared understanding and balanced decision-making.

The following sections examine two distinct but complementary components of food systems governance—**government-led structures** and **non-state ecosystems of support**. When government-led structures and non-state actors work in synergy, they combine institutional authority and societal legitimacy, technical expertise and grounded knowledge, thereby enabling a diversity of perspectives in agenda-setting, more robust mechanisms for accountability, and broader capacities for implementation. This interplay helps navigate trade-offs, manage conflicts of interest, and drive more adaptive and resilient transformation.

### Government-led governance structure

**Government-led food systems governance structures refer to the institutional arrangements through which public authorities coordinate, implement, and evaluate collective actions** aimed at transforming food systems.

Anchored in the public mandate, these platforms—when supported by high-level political leadership—facilitate cross-ministerial coordination, ensure coherence across sectors, and align national and local actions. They provide the backbone for participatory decision-making and accountability, enabling diverse stakeholders to engage in policy processes that reflect shared values and negotiated trade-offs.

**While food systems are gaining traction on policy agendas, governments struggle to operationalize coordination across ministries and sectors.** Institutional architectures are typically designed for specialization, rather than integration: ministries operate in silos, mandates overlap, and accountability systems emphasise sectoral performance targets rather than shared outcomes. Resources and visibility are often guarded, reinforcing competition over collaboration. As a result, even well-intentioned efforts can work at cross purposes, and policies that succeed in one domain may create unintended consequences in another. At the same time, overly centralized coordination can dilute accountability or obscure what is or isn't working on the ground<sup>5,6</sup>.

Some countries, however, are demonstrating that effective food systems governance is not only possible but is also taking root and evolving, shaped by ongoing learning and adaptation.

<sup>10</sup> FAO. 2023. *Governance for Sustainable Food Systems*. Rome, FAO.



**When effectively institutionalized, such structures serve as engines of systemic change, balancing technical expertise, stakeholder input, and political commitment.** The case of **Somalia**, supported by the Startup Fund, demonstrates that high-level political anchoring, combined with a multi-ministerial mandate and structured coordination mechanisms, enables governments to overcome fragmentation and elevate food systems as a national priority, even in fragile settings.

**Tajikistan**, also supported by the Startup Fund, demonstrates how legal mandates, procedural clarity, and institutional permanence can ensure continuity, legitimacy, and accountability across political cycles.

These examples confirm that **durable governance depends on embedding food systems transformation into the core functions of government, beyond individual champions or temporary initiatives.**

### Ecosystem of Support (EoS)

**An ecosystem of support is the constellation of non-state actors**—civil society, private sector, academia, UN agencies, international financial institutions, NGOs, and Coalitions of Action—that work in close connection with government-led governance structures **to advance food systems transformation.** These actors contribute critical capacities: community-rooted knowledge, technical expertise, social accountability, and cross-sectoral networks.

Among these actors, the UNFSS Coalitions of Action—which emerged during the 2021 Summit as self-organizing, multistakeholder platforms—have become an integral part of this ecosystem, supporting countries in operationalizing their national pathways through peer engagement, technical cooperation, and knowledge exchange aligned with nationally defined priorities.

Beyond implementation, **a well-functioning ecosystem of support helps set agendas, sustain momentum, and connect policy with people's lived realities.** When structured, inclusive, and aligned with national strategies, it acts as a powerful complement to public institutions.

Yet Convenors often face constraints: fragmented coordination, limited recognition, and few entry points for grassroots actors<sup>5,6</sup>. Examples from **Brazil** and the **Regional Nutrition and Food Systems Task Force in Asia and the Pacific**, however, illustrate how ecosystems of support, when deliberately integrated, can drive more inclusive and resilient transformation.

The case of Brazil demonstrates that legal recognition, civic inclusiveness, and structured engagement channels enable civil society and other actors to transition from consultation to co-creation, effectively shaping national food systems agendas. In the Asia Pacific region, the Task Force demonstrates how coordinated, cross-sectoral platforms can align technical support and financing with country priorities, thereby overcoming fragmentation and reinforcing national momentum. These experiences affirm that **ecosystems of support become transformative when they are institutionally empowered and strategically connected to governance processes.**



## 2.F. MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE PATHWAY IMPLEMENTATION

Robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems are essential to the implementation of national food systems pathways. They provide a structured means to track implementation, assess progress, and recalibrate strategies, ensuring that the pathway translates into measurable results. MEL frameworks also underpin transparency, accountability, and adaptive leadership throughout the implementation process.

Because food systems pathways engage multiple sectors—from agriculture and health to trade and climate—effective MEL must go beyond data collection. They must link pathway actions to outcomes, such as improved nutrition, climate resilience, or equity, enabling governments to identify what is working and where resources need realignment.

Convenors face recurring challenges in setting up and utilizing effective MEL systems. MEL systems and capacities are often nascent, institutional responsibilities remain unclear, and few tools support continuous learning and adaptation<sup>5,6</sup>.

Yet progress in some countries is visible. **Cambodia** and **Nigeria** are embedding MEL into national strategies, linking it to budget processes and clarifying institutional roles. Nigeria illustrates how tools such as the **Food Systems Dashboard** and the **Food Systems Countdown Initiative** can be adapted to strengthen interministerial coordination and visibility.

**Foundational steps for strong MEL systems** include aligning indicators with national strategies, assigning institutional roles, integrating budgeting cycles, and tailoring global tools to national needs. **Strong MEL frameworks must connect pathway actions to broader food system outcomes**, such as improved nutrition, enhanced equity, climate resilience, and food security. When embedded in national strategies and linked to macro-level indicators and planning instruments, MEL becomes a central backbone for decision-making, not merely a reporting tool. Institutionalizing these systems requires coordination across ministries, clarity of mandates, and consistent capacity building.

**Rather than being conceived as a technical process, MEL should be recognized as a governance function.** When nationally owned, embedded in public policy cycles, and politically supported, MEL systems enable governments to identify what is working, where bottlenecks persist, and how strategies should be adapted. In this way, MEL becomes a vital instrument to guide and sustain the implementation of national pathways, thereby strengthening transparency, accountability, and the credibility of transformation efforts over time.

## 2.G. PATHWAY REVIEW

**National food systems pathways are designed to evolve**, but they often remain static. Many countries lack structured review mechanisms, making it difficult to assess whether implementation is on track or whether priorities remain relevant. As a result, even as new evidence emerges or conditions change, pathways are rarely updated to reflect shifting needs<sup>5,6</sup>.

A strong MEL system should inform this process by identifying what works and what doesn't. Evaluation and learning provide the evidence base for periodic reviews. These reviews are critical for revisiting priorities, refining timelines, reassigning responsibilities, and course-correcting strategies.

Though still emerging, **country experiences show that regular, evidence-informed reviews can transform the pathway from a one-time document into a dynamic tool for adaptive governance.** This adaptation is essential to keep national food systems transformation efforts credible, responsive, fit for purpose, and results-driven.

As of June 2025, 39 countries have reported to the Hub that they have revised their national food systems pathways. However, most updates were not prompted by formal evaluations. Instead, countries cited the need to align with evolving national strategies, respond to policy shifts, or adapt to external pressures such as climate change or political transitions. Only a handful anchored their revisions in structured MEL processes or stocktaking exercises. Standard methods included stakeholder dialogues, cross-ministerial coordination, and integration with national planning frameworks, while a few engaged in comprehensive reformulations based on diagnostics or technical support. These trends suggest that while adaptive governance is increasingly recognized, institutional capacities to operationalize it remain limited.

This section summarises key takeaways from countries that have shared their revised pathways with the Hub: **Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Switzerland.**

Structured reviews remain rare, but countries are finding alternative entry points to keep their pathways relevant. Policy renewal, inclusive dialogue, and intersectoral coordination are common triggers for updates. While few countries systematically use M&E findings, the emerging practices reveal opportunities for institutionalizing adaptive governance over time.

↓ **Costa Rica – A worker selects pineapples for packaging by applying good agricultural practices throughout the production process.**  
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## CHAPTER 3

# CONCLUSION

This document summarises key emerging evidence and compiles concrete country experiences that demonstrate how national food systems pathways are implemented successfully, and often against the odds. **It is not a manual or roadmap, but a curated reference of how governments are overcoming the recurring bottlenecks that many still face:** fragmented governance, limited financial visibility, weak stakeholder engagement, and the difficulty of turning plans into fundable, sequenced actions.

Throughout its chapters, the document highlights countries that have made visible strides—by strengthening multi stakeholder platforms, aligning pathways with national budgets and planning cycles, building investment pipelines from territorial diagnostics, and addressing policy coherence and integration challenges. These are not isolated successes—they are signals of what's possible when implementation is driven by political will, institutional coordination, and sustained technical engagement.

**The value of this document lies in its pragmatism:** each example provides actionable insight into what was done, how it was done, and how challenges were navigated. For National Convenors and implementation partners, it offers not a path to follow, but a set of tested strategies to adapt, rooted in real practice, not theory.

The message is clear: implementation is advancing, driven by countries that are adapting to complexity, aligning across sectors, and taking forward their national food systems pathways with determination and pragmatism. This document reflects that momentum, not as a set of prescriptions, but as a collection of concrete practices that others can learn from and adapt. As governments continue to move from commitment to delivery, these experiences affirm a central truth: transformation is not only urgent—it is achievable, and in many contexts, it is already well underway.

# CHAPTER 4

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