



National and Sub-national Food Systems Multi-Stakeholder Mechanisms: An Assessment of Experiences



Image credit: Ola Jennersten / WWF-Sweden

CHAPTER 2

Comparative case analysis

Introduction



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The following section presents the findings of the research related to the different elements analysed for the 10 SFS MSMs studied. It describes and compares their foundational and structural factors, formats, governance arrangements, the way they engage the actors (and which actors) and how dialogue is designed and facilitated. It analyses how these factors

influence their success and achievement of results. It also highlights examples of the innovative dynamics observed in relation to governance arrangements, the promotion of sustainable food systems, policy formulation and implementation. Finally, it captures some of the key challenges faced by these SFS MSMs.

Note: The limitations of this study are explained in Annex 1. In light of these limitations, conclusions stemming from the survey results should be considered indicative and illustrative, and not representative.

1. Foundational and structural factors

1.1. It takes more than political will to create an effective SFS MSM

In the majority of the cases studied (8 out of 10), it was the convergence of several factors that led to the creation of the SFS MSM. In particular, it was the combination of at least three of the following conditions:

- Political will, i.e. a leader or “champion” from the government giving political support;
- The passage of a policy, law or regulation stipulating the creation of a food multi-stakeholder platform;
- The presence of a perceived food insecurity problem in the country or city;
- A strong social movement (activism by consumer organizations or social protest, for instance) advocating to improve food-related issues.

In the survey, the focal points indicated that political will was the most important condition for the establishment of the SFS MSM (6 out of 10 respondents), but in half of the cases the other three aforementioned conditions were also cited. In the majority of the cases (7 out of 10) there was a champion advocating for the

creation of the SFS MSM. It is usually a leader from the government (in particular the mayor in the case of cities), but in some cases the champion belongs to a different stakeholder group. In the case of London, the champion was the mayor (government), while in the case of Quito, it was a public-private sector association (ConQuito); in the case of La Paz, it was a civil society organization (Fundación Alternativas), and in the case of Ghent, it was a political party (the local Green Party). In the case of the Southern cities (Quito, La Paz and Antananarivo), the signing of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) is also referenced as an important milestone galvanizing the emergence of the SFS MSM.

Political support is paramount for the set-up and good functioning of MSMs. According to the survey conducted among stakeholders, a large majority of respondents (72 per cent) believe that the SFS MSM in which they participate has strong political support, commitment and engagement; no significant differences are apparent between the cases. This has certainly been a decisive factor in the creation of these successful cases, although it is not the only condition needed, as the surveys reveal.

1.2. Building successful collaboration takes time

Setting up an effective SFS MSM takes time. As shown in Figure 2, it took from one to four years to establish²³ the SFS MSM for the majority (6 out of 10) of the cases studied. In France, London and La Paz it took less than a year, while Denmark reported a time frame of more than five years. In many cases (Montreal, Denmark, Los Angeles, Antananarivo), the SFS MSM burgeoned from a previous collaborative arrangement (platform, movement, small group of dedicated initiators) between two or more of the stakeholders. This means that processes of building interpersonal relationships, trust, constructive dialogue and human understanding – which are key ingredients for a successful SFS MSM – started even before the conceptualization or emergence of the SFS MSM. A prior history of collaboration seems to be a strong driver of a successful SFS MSM.

1.3. Funding is crucial

The literature points to a lack of resources as one of the main challenges to achieving long-term sustainability of such multi-stakeholder structures. In this study, eight out of the 10 cases reported having a regular operating budget (the two exceptions are Quito and Antananarivo), which has undoubtedly been key to their sustainability and success.

The budget is used mainly for meetings (in all cases), and also for learning exchanges, workshops, new project start-ups and communication products and

materials in 6 out of 10 cases. In half of the SFS MSMs studied, it also covers the coordinator's salary, consultancies and studies. There seems to be a correlation between the budget's availability and amount, and the capacity of the SFS MSM to achieve concrete results. Of all 10 cases studied, Denmark reports the highest available budget (EUR8 million per year). Its SFS MSM also shows more concrete results in terms of measured impact and achievements perceived and listed by the stakeholders surveyed. While not receiving any regular operating subsidies, Organic Denmark helped to create and then utilize public and public-private funding pools for projects for market development, education, supply chain collaboration and innovation in food production. Conversely, the two cases reporting no available operating budget (Quito and Antananarivo), are at an earlier stage in showing results and impact, in particular in relation to policy implementation. In these two cases, funding from occasional projects and resources made available by participants have made it possible to get the SFS MSM started and achieve early results. However, taking their work to the next level will require sustained long-term funding. Similarly, in La Paz and India, the SFS MSMs operate with fewer resources than those in the Global North, and the stakeholders surveyed cited the lack of resources as a major challenge when attempting to expand their activities and achieve a greater impact. The need for capacity building, advocacy, partnerships and market development is clear, especially in the Global South.

There are notable regional differences between the North and the South in terms of funding SFS MSMs. This may be due to differences in their lifespan and

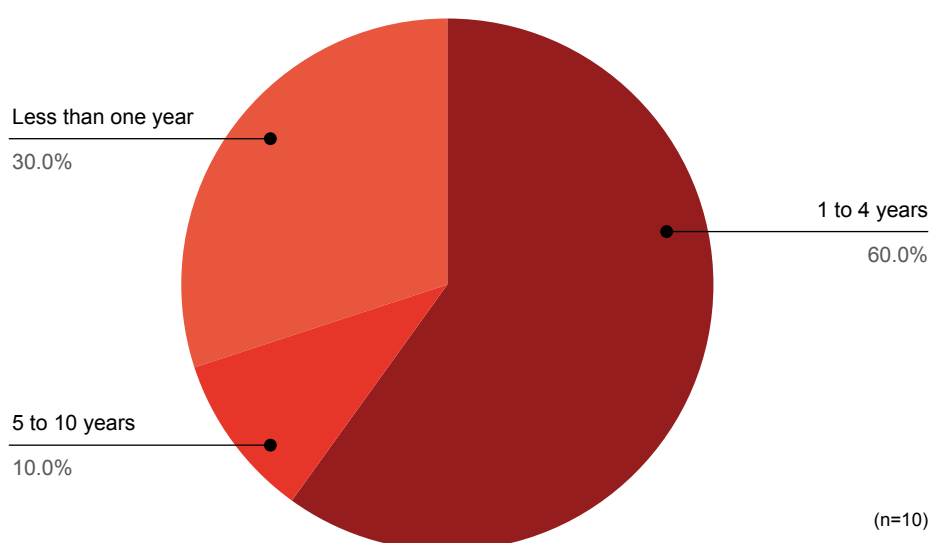


Figure 2. Average time needed to set up the SFS MSM

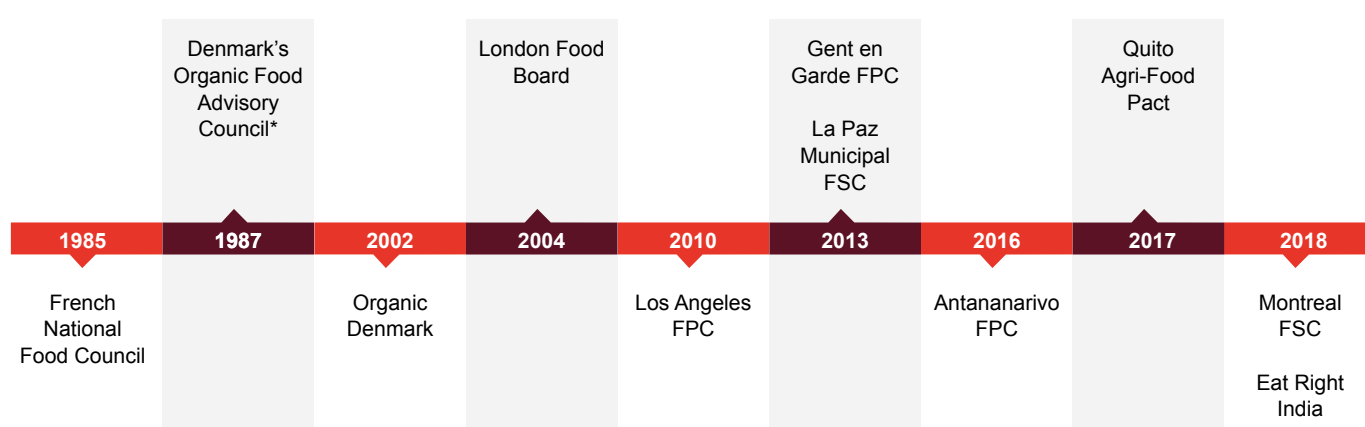
²³ Time frame from initial idea/mandate/decreed to first multi-stakeholder meeting.

maturity as formal SFS MSMs. The financial factor is thus one of the main reasons why most of the cases in the North are more successful than those in the South in terms of achieving concrete results in the promotion of sustainable food systems. Indeed, available literature and information collected and reviewed in the course of this study shows that SFS MSMs in the Global South usually start with project funding (mainly as a result of international cooperation) that makes it possible to finance the first meetings and even some policy work. Nevertheless, they tend to reach a tipping point where institutionalization, government support and long-term funding seem crucial to keep the momentum, move forward and achieve impact on the ground. It is also possible that, in the case of SFS MSMs starting with project funding, the push for establishing them comes from outside and not from within, and in such cases the

above-mentioned factors for success (e.g. political will and support, an existing collaborative arrangement) were maybe not fully met.

1.4. Institutionalization is pivotal

All 10 cases reported some level of formalization in their legal status. Most of them (8 out of 10) are either institutionalized²⁴ platforms (4 out of 10) or non-institutionalized mechanisms but with strong government support for their operation (4 out of 10). There is a correlation between the achievement of the SFS MSM's institutionalization and its lifespan, as shown in Figure 3. The majority of SFS MSMs that are already institutionalized are in operation for more than 10 years.



*Denmark's Organic Food Advisory Council was the first SFS MSM established in Denmark to advance organic food development.

Figure 3. Year of creation of the SFS MSM

In the majority of the cases (6 out of 10), an institution or organization hosts the SFS MSM. The host institution seems to be an essential collaborator, usually providing professional and sometimes financial support with in-kind resources such as meeting space, materials and supplies, and access to networking. The host institution is also often the SFS MSM leader. In the case of the London Food Board, for instance, the Greater London Authority²⁵ (GLA) functions as host organization and leader of the platform.

All the cases studied have structural autonomy, as they operate outside of the government, while maintaining strong links with public officials. According to Gupta et al. (2018), this allows SFS MSMs to retain their independence while fostering more inclusive policy-making processes linking communities to their

government. For instance, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) convenes public working groups and conversations, jointly attended by government, NGOs, industry representatives and community members. Outside of this, the SFS MSM also facilitates conversations with each group to establish common ground between public and governmental interests in order to reach consensus on topics that may be difficult to discuss. Organic Denmark, while highly institutionalized, is at the same time a model where a multi-stakeholder platform of farmers, food professionals, food companies and consumers created close network-based partnerships with stakeholders representing trade unions, NGOs representing nature, climate, consumers, conventional farmers and animal welfare, as well as government agencies and politicians. This has resulted in a dynamic MSM that is

²⁵The GLA is a top-tier administrative body responsible for the strategic administration of Greater London. It was created in 1999 and consists of a directly elected mayor to represent London's interests and an elected 25-member London Assembly with scrutiny powers; the mayor and assembly members are elected on a four-yearly cycle.

less formal in character but effective in creating strong market and political ecosystems in which sustainable organic food systems can thrive.

1.5. Connecting at different levels promotes a greater impact

While the geographical focus of the three country cases (France, Denmark and India) is the national level, these SFS MSMs also operate at regional and city level in some regions and cities, in collaboration with municipalities, other stakeholders and networks. The national level provides the framing for the agenda at sub-national level. The majority of the sub-national cases have a geographical scope that goes beyond the limits of the city and includes a city-region focus (Antananarivo, Montreal, Quito and La Paz) or a sub-regional focus (Los Angeles).

Additionally, in all 10 cases studied, the SFS MSMs establish connections with other similar structures at different levels.²⁶ In the case of Europe and North America, which are the regions with the largest number of established FPCs, there are even more networks, at different levels, to which the MSMs connect to collaborate and share experiences. In the case of Montreal, for instance, the Montreal Food System Council has established connections with the MUFPP (international), the Sustainable Food Network (Canada), the Food Communities Network (Canada), the Collectif des Tables intersectorielles régionales sur

les saines habitudes de vie (Quebec) and the Eastern Montreal Food Network (Montreal). Likewise, LAFPC collaborates with the California Food Policy Council, the California Food and Farm Network and the Los Angeles-based Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network, among others. LAFPC's involvement with different networks is framed within the wider collective impact model²⁷ (see Annex 8), through which the SFS MSM generates an ecosystem comprising:

- These external working groups and networks;
- Working groups or subcommittees dedicated to developing policy recommendations around specific issues;
- Food interest groups (from culinary arts to storytelling) to support diverse interests and promote dialogue by generating knowledge, learning and opportunities, and to network with like-minded peers;
- Networking events to enhance cross-sector food engagement.

This multidimensional governance structure has proven effective in keeping both government and community stakeholders at the table by providing all parties with meaningful opportunities to align interests and achieve food systems change.

Most have established connections with international city networks, such as the MUFPP, the ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network and the C40 Cities network.



²⁶There might be bias in this point as many of the cases selected were identified through these networks.

²⁷<https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/what-collective-impact>

2. SFS MSMs – roles and thematic areas

2.1. Key roles played

According to the stakeholder survey respondents, the most common key roles played by the SFS MSM (shown in Figure 4) are: networking (selected by 74 per cent of respondents); policy formulation (73 per cent); new collaborations (71 per cent); and advocacy (62 per cent). Only half of respondents indicated that their SFS MSM also plays a key role in terms of policy implementation. This is partly due to the fact that some of them are quite new and need more time to move from policy formulation to policy implementation. These roles, which can be grouped into two categories (policy-related and partnership building work) are, according to respondents, the areas where the SFS MSMs studied have focused and achieved more results.

It is important to note that only 19 per cent of respondents mentioned that their SFS MSM plays a key role in addressing trade-offs when there are conflicting agendas. This result will be further developed in the following sections.

Lobbying and advocacy to bring important issues to light are at the heart of an SFS MSM's work. According to the focal points' survey, the large majority of the cases studied (8 out of 10) engage in these kinds of activities, mainly to influence decision-makers on

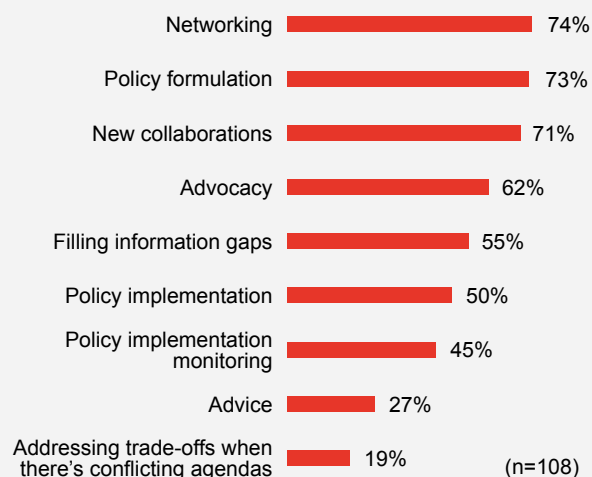


Figure 4. Perceived key roles played by the SFS MSM (multiple answers possible)

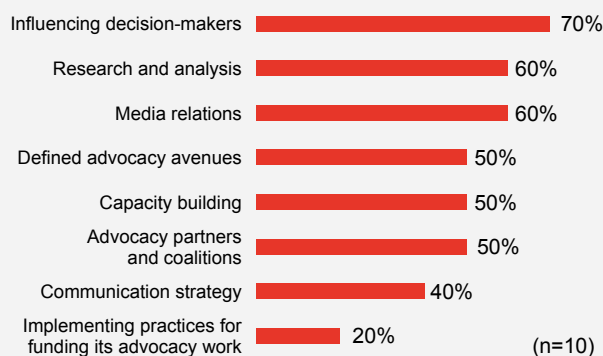


Figure 5. Lobbying and advocacy activities (multiple answers possible)

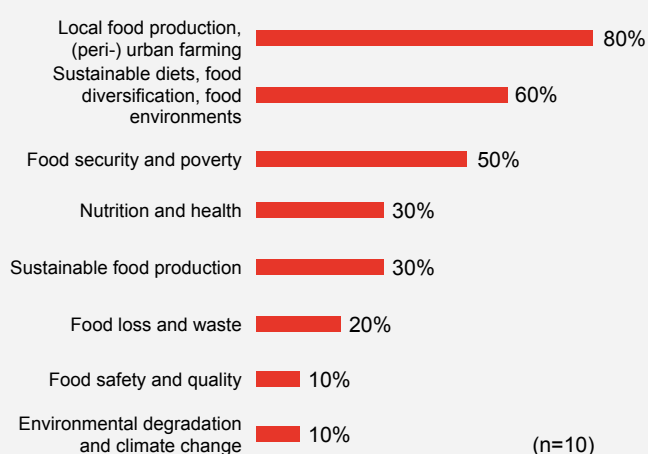


Figure 6. Food systems priorities addressed by the SFS MSM (multiple answers possible)

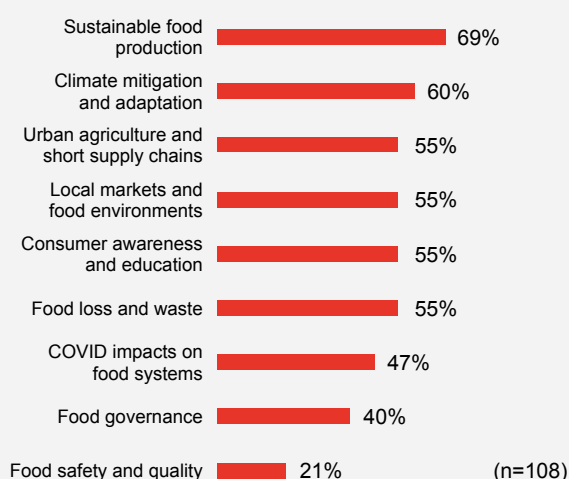


Figure 7: Issues selected by respondents to be prioritized in the SFS MSM in the coming years (multiple answers possible)

food-related policies (in 7 out of 8 cases). The focal points also indicated policy formulation (in all cases), expert consultation and advice (in 8 out of 10 cases), knowledge management on food systems and stimulating collective actions and new initiatives (in 7 out of 10 cases) as main roles of their SFS MSMs.

Figure 5 shows that advocacy activities usually focus on research and analysis, capacity building, advocacy partners and coalitions, media relations and defined advocacy avenues. Only four of the cases studied have a communication strategy, and fundraising practices to fund advocacy work are less common.

2.2. Agriculture still dominates SFS work, but there are winds of change

In terms of key food systems priorities that have been addressed so far by the SFS MSMs, Figure 6 shows that “local production and peri-urban farming” is the most frequent “hot topic” addressed by the SFS MSMs studied (8 out of 10 cases). This theme is followed by “sustainable diets, food diversification, food environments” (in 6 out of 10 cases) and “food security and poverty” (in half of the cases). This finding is consistent with the fact that agriculture is the sector that has traditionally been related to food security and food systems, and it is usually the most represented sector in MSMs dealing with food issues. In contrast, “environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss” and “food safety and quality” were indicated in only one of the cases as topics that have been prioritized so far by the SFS MSM in question. This finding suggests that, even if the environmental sector is represented in all the cases studied, environment-related topics have not yet been given much prominence.

Nevertheless, it seems that the environmental sustainability angle (in relation to climate change, biodiversity, soil health and landscape management, for example) may become more important in the future for these SFS MSMs. In the stakeholder survey, participants were asked about the issues they thought their SFS MSM should prioritize in the coming years. While it must be noted that the majority of them still prioritize sustainable food production, the rest of the responses suggest that there are only slight differences in the respondents’ preferences for future priorities (see Figure 7). The responses also show the increasing uptake and prominence of the topic of environmental sustainability and climate change in the work related to food systems, as the three top priorities relate to the environmental sustainability of the food system.

There is therefore a clear trend toward gradually expanding the thematic focus of these SFS MSMs, to go beyond interventions at the production level to other interventions that address consumption and other elements and actors in the food system. This shift seems to be coupled with (and probably partly caused by) the progressive expansion in the diversity of participants engaged in these SFS MSMs. This will be further explained in the next chapter.

2.3. Growing uptake of the food systems approach

To carry out their work, 4 out of the 10 cases studied use the food systems approach as their guiding conceptual framework (Denmark, India, Ghent and Montreal). If we consider Quito and Antananarivo, which used the City Region Food System (CRFS) approach, signed up to the MUFPP monitoring framework and participated in developing MUFPP indicators (all of which take a food systems approach), a total of 6 out of the 10 cases studied use a conceptual framework based on this approach. The rest of the SFS MSMs apply their own conceptual framework, based in all cases on a holistic conceptualization of the food system. In La Paz, for example, the Municipal Food Security Committee has developed its own integrated food systems approach (for further information on this approach, see Chapter 3, Section 2.6). Denmark, where the environmental angle is strongest, also uses the ecosystem approach²⁸ to guide its work.

Despite being a relatively new conceptual framework, the stakeholder survey respondents concur (agree or strongly agree) that the food systems approach to policy-making and implementation is understood by the majority of stakeholders (77 per cent). Nevertheless, respondents' perceptions of the inclusion of this approach in the work of the SFS MSM, in particular with regard to the environmental angle, are mixed (Figure 8). Nevertheless, the majority of stakeholders (about 65 per cent) think that the uptake of the food systems approach and the level of inclusion of the environmental angle is high to very high.

Some stakeholders indicate that while “systems thinking” is encouraged in the SFS MSM, it may take a while to show results, as changing people’s mindsets from siloed thinking to systemic thinking is not easy.

Indeed, the transformations required for a truly systemic approach to the food issue are structural, political and technical, and therefore require time. It seems that a structural bias still remains in the SFS MSMs studied, in terms of a balanced composition of actors and expertise, as well as a certain inertia on the part of organizations and individuals who are used to working from a sectoral and thematic perspective. Consequently, most of the exemplary and successful SFS MSMs studied here still show more results in areas related to food production (urban agriculture, for instance), as will be discussed later in this report.

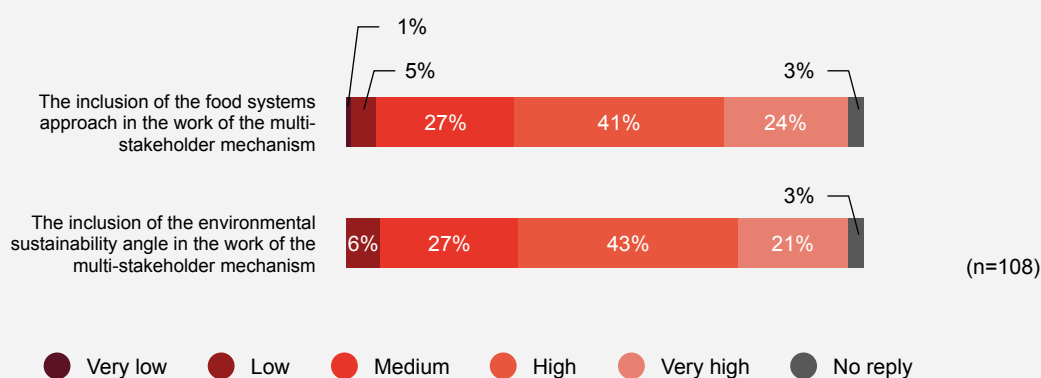


Figure 8. Perceived level of uptake of the food systems approach and the environmental sustainability angle in the SFS MSM

²⁸The ecosystem approach is the primary framework for action under the Convention on Biological Diversity. It is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

3. The “rules of the game”: governance and dialogue



Image credit: Los Angeles Food Policy Council

3.1. A wide spectrum of stakeholders and strong government support

More diversity in these kinds of mechanisms is strongly linked to their legitimacy. Diversity is seen as an asset, even if it produces more friction and conflict, because the variety of views generates more and better insight into the system and issue at hand, and encourages creativity and the need to reach consensus and win-win solutions (Brouwer et al., 2015).

As shown in Figure 9, a large majority of the cases studied comprise more than 16 stakeholders, with half of the cases having more than 31 stakeholders.

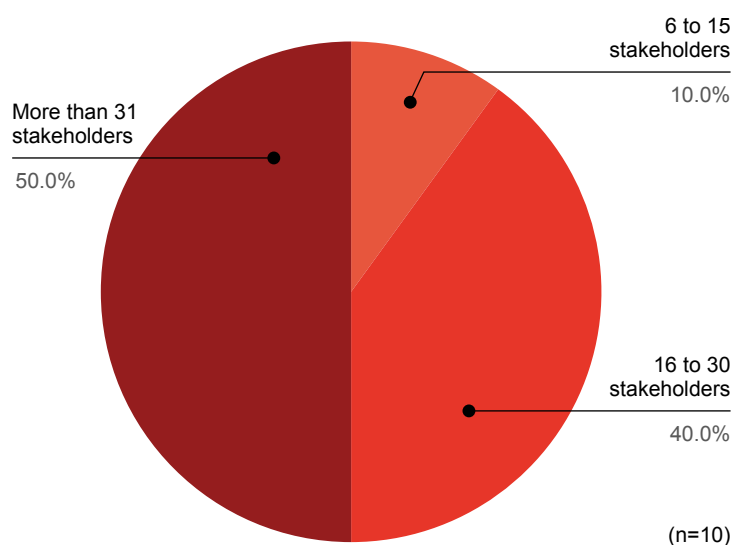


Figure 9. Number of stakeholders participating in the SFS MSM

Figure 10 shows that all relevant food system stakeholders (from different constituencies)²⁹ are represented in almost all the SFS MSMs analysed. In the majority of them (7 out of 10), the leadership role is filled by the government.

	Government	Civil society	Private sector	NGO	Farmers	Academic institution	International organization
French National Food Council							
Organic Denmark							
Eat Right India							
Gent en Garde FPC							
London Food Board							
Montreal FSC							
Los Angeles FPC							
Quito Agri-Food Pact							
La Paz Municipal FSC							
Antananarivo FPC							

Figure 10. Composition of stakeholders in the MSM: Type of organization represented (constituency)

The agriculture, environment and health sectors are represented in all 10 SFS MSMs; the nutrition sector is represented in 9 out of 10 cases and social development is represented in 8 of 10 (see Figure 11).

	Agriculture	Environment	Health	Nutrition	Social development	Education	Trade	Urban planning	Finance
French National Food Council									
Organic Denmark									
Eat Right India									
Gent en Garde FPC									
London Food Board									
Montreal FSC									
Los Angeles FPC									
Quito Agri-Food Pact									
La Paz Municipal FSC									
Antananarivo FPC									

Figure 11. Stakeholder composition in the MSM: Sectors represented

Figure 12 shows that a wide variety of actors, engaged in many different food systems activities, are represented in the SFS MSMs studied. While in some cases all main food systems activities are represented (France, Ghent and Los Angeles), in other cases the representation is not so complete (India and La Paz, for instance).

	Produce food (farming)	Produce food (industry)	Sell and market food	Provide services and info	Research on SFS	Advise or consult on SFS	Advocate for SFS	Provide training on SFS	Education or comms on SFS	Work on SFS policy
French National Food Council										
Organic Denmark										
Eat Right India										
Gent en Garde FPC										
London Food Board										
Montreal FSC										
Los Angeles FPC										
Quito Agri-Food Pact										
La Paz Municipal FSC										
Antananarivo FPC										

Figure 12. Stakeholder composition in the MSM: Food systems activities represented

²⁹Seven key constituency types were used in this study: government (public sector), civil society (CSOs), private sector, NGOs, farmers (or farmers' groups), academic institutions and international organizations. For more information, see Annex 4.

In almost all cases studied (9 out of 10), the stakeholders represented in the SFS MSMs were selected by the focal point or coordinator based on a food system stakeholder mapping or existing food-related platforms. In the case of Montreal, however, statutory members are appointed by public institutions, and other members are selected following a call for applications. The representatives from each stakeholder group appointed to participate in the SFS MSM are usually appointed by the organization represented by direct designation (60 per cent) or directly by the SFS MSM focal point or coordinator (50 per cent). It is common to see different modalities used in selecting the representatives, such as in the case of Los Angeles where they can also be self-appointed by virtue of personal motivation or selected by vote within the organization they represent.

The processes for selecting and admitting new members into the SFS MSMs are not clear and transparent to everyone. Although the majority of respondents to the stakeholder survey concur that there are clear and agreed processes, in some cases a higher percentage of respondents indicated that they disagree or strongly disagree with this statement (in particular, 50 per cent for Ghent and 25 per cent for Quito, with no significant differences per stakeholder constituency).

These findings could indicate that, in some cases, there might be a bias related to the strong influence exerted by those in leadership and coordination roles in the MSM in proposing and deciding who will be part of the mechanism. A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to select participants is often more appropriate. In addition, most of the SFS



Image credit: Elaine Casap by Unsplash

MSMs studied have created several small working groups, with the intention of enabling meaningful participation and being more inclusive. While 80 per cent of respondents to the stakeholder survey contend that participation in the mechanism adequately reflects the diversity of stakeholders in the given food system, a not insignificant 10 per cent of respondents, mainly from NGOs (64 per cent), disagree or strongly disagree with this statement; they argue that it is still necessary to include the voices of more disadvantaged actors at grassroots level. It is often the case that some informal “invisible actors”, such as street food vendors and women cooking in informal settings, do not participate in this kind of governance mechanism, despite their often crucial role in the (local) food system. Some respondents indicate that access to technology, transport and financial support may hinder their chances of participating in these kinds of mechanisms. This challenge is frequently pointed out by critics of multi-stakeholder governance.

These findings reinforce the need to better address agency and power imbalances in the SFS MSMs studied.

3.2. Relevant goals, plans and strategies

Half of the cases studied (Denmark, France, London, Montreal and Los Angeles) have a written strategy document setting out their goals, plans and strategies.

A large majority of stakeholders (88 per cent) agree that their SFS MSM clearly identifies and articulates its vision, mission and goals among its members and that it has well-defined policy and advocacy priorities, either as part of a plan or an overall strategy (84 per cent of respondents), as shown in Figure 13.

Likewise, the majority of stakeholders surveyed believe that their SFS MSM understands the overall policy environment related to its priorities (85 per cent) and has basic knowledge about its policy subject matter (90 per cent).

3.3. Principles for democratic multi-stakeholder governance

One of the central challenges of MSMs revolves around nurturing and facilitating a working relationship based on trust, mutual respect, open communication and understanding of each other’s strengths and weaknesses (ODI and FDC, 2003). It is therefore unsurprising to see the importance attached to good governance principles in the successful SFS MSMs studied. Almost all of them have adopted good governance principles (9 out of 10), which are either stated in a written document (in half of the cases) or are implicit (4 out of 10). The only exception is Antananarivo, where good governance principles have not yet been established, mainly because of its relative “youth”.

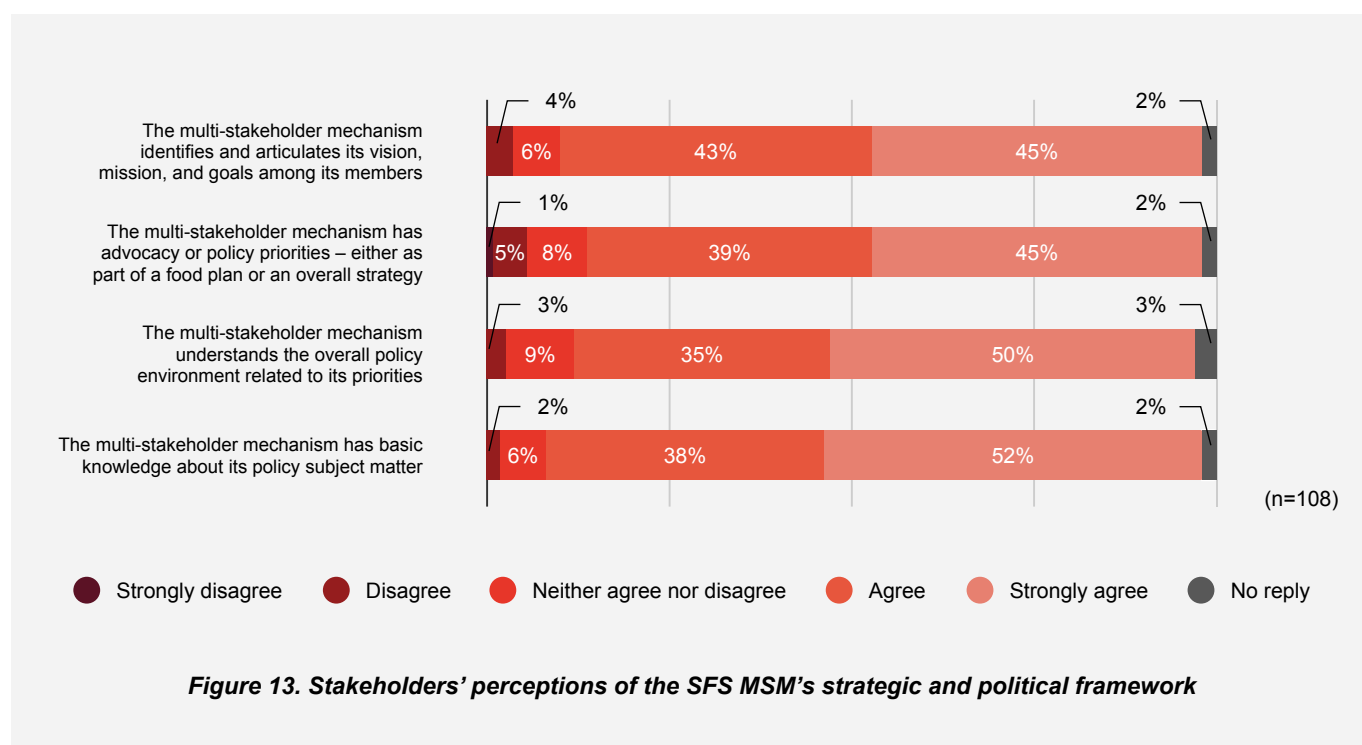


Figure 13. Stakeholders’ perceptions of the SFS MSM’s strategic and political framework

Figure 14 shows that “engagement”, “sound financial management” and “transparency” are the most frequently embraced good governance principles (indicated in 8 out of the 9 cases with defined good governance principles). These are followed by “inclusiveness and equity”, “trust, networking and relationships” and “leadership” (7 out of 9 cases) and “participatory learning and capacity building”, “accountability” and “respect for human rights and diversity” enshrined in 6 out of 9 cases. These principles are consistent with one of the main reasons cited in the literature for creating this type of governance mechanism, which is to support the inclusive, transparent and equal participation of all stakeholders in decision-making on food systems. In addition, 5 out of 9 of the cases include “innovation and openness to change” among their good governance principles. The least used ones are “rule of law and ethical conduct code” and “responsiveness” (4 out of 9).

The SFS MSMs in France, La Paz and Los Angeles are the only ones embracing all the good governance principles (12 out of 12), followed by Quito and Montreal (9), as shown in Figure 15.

A large majority of stakeholders (81 per cent) indicated in the stakeholders' survey that their SFS MSM respects the agreed code of conduct, the rule of law and good governance principles, even in a case like Organic Denmark where codes of conduct and governance are less formalized (the rest neither agrees nor disagrees). Unquestionably, the importance given to good governance in these MSMs has been fundamental to their perceived legitimacy and to the achievement of good results.

3.4. The balance of power: the elephant in the room?

All SFS MSMs studied have established mechanisms to put their good governance principles into practice. Figure 16 shows that the majority of SFS MSMs (7 out of 9) have put in place mechanisms to capture and take into account all voices, and to foster collaborative learning and capacity building. There are also defined processes to include voices that are not in the SFS MSM for specific processes (e.g. policy-related citizen consultations), to communicate effectively and to achieve consensus (6 out of 9).

One interesting finding is that fewer cases have established procedures to address power relations and power imbalances (only 3 out of 9), and to manage conflicts of interest (5 out of 9). There is an essential aspiration at the heart of SFS MSMs to build more inclusive, participatory governance in which the voices of those most affected by policy decisions can be heard

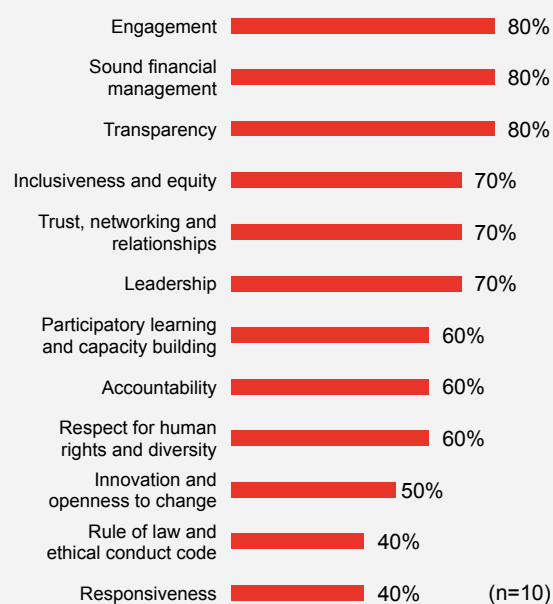


Figure 14. Good governance principles used by the 10 SFS MSMs (multiple answers possible)

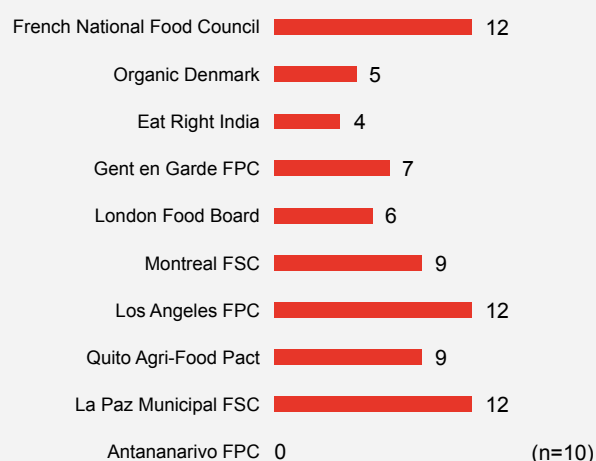


Figure 15. Number of good governance principles used in each SFS MSM

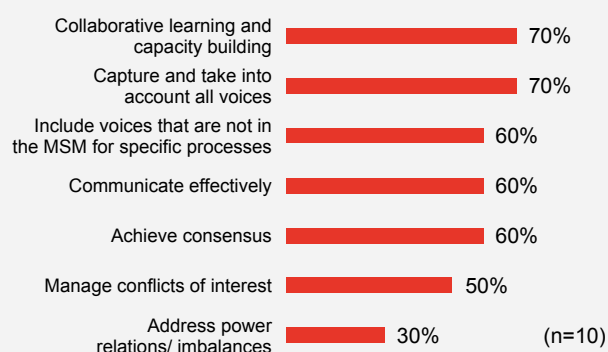


Figure 16. Mechanisms in place to put good governance principles into practice (multiple answers possible)

and their rights defended (World Bank, 2011). Yet the inability to manage power imbalances is one of the main challenges and criticisms of multistakeholderism (Hiemstra et al., 2012), raising questions about its legitimacy for good governance. Achieving better policies for food systems requires overcoming friction related to facts, interests and values (OECD, 2021). Power differences usually manifest themselves in multi-stakeholder processes, and it is very difficult for less powerful actors to influence what is going on in these MSMs, or to shift power dynamics in their favour. Notwithstanding this, the majority of successful SFS MSMs in this study seem to pay less attention to these issues.

As a consequence, it is not surprising that some of the stakeholders surveyed made statements such as “there is still a great deal of resistance to sharing a slice of the pie, the pie being power”. According to them, sometimes “big NGOs and the private sector participate in defence of their own economic interests, without a genuine intention to collaborate and reach agreements and joint commitments”. This is believed to “limit the opportunities for stakeholders, especially the most impacted people, to create solutions that address the challenges they face in their communities”. In conclusion, it seems that in many of the cases studied there is a pending task related to the management of power relations.

3.5. Procedures to collaborate and navigate difficult dialogue

In addition to formal meetings, interaction between stakeholders happens in all kinds of formal and informal settings and ways, following a complex pattern of personal and professional relations and networks. Of all possible means of engagement, the preferred one is attending meetings (for 100 per cent of stakeholders), followed by written feedback and consultation by email, letters or document sharing (90 per cent). Participants also make use of oral feedback in 80 per cent of the cases.

The majority of the SFS MSMs (in France, India, Antananarivo, Ghent, London, Montreal and Los Angeles) meet in plenary four to five times a year. In all 10 cases, there are established working groups, task forces, committees or teams working on specific topics or processes. It is not uncommon to have different meeting frequencies for these subgroups. Extraordinary sessions can also take place, depending on the context and (urgent) issues at hand. Finally, in several cases, such as in Quito, COVID-19-related restrictions limited the number of meetings held in 2020, limiting the functioning of the SFS MSM.

There is usually a predefined annual calendar for



Image credit: © Karine Aigner / WWF-US

the plenary meetings (in 8 of the 10 cases studied). However, in most cases, the leading organization can also convene at any time for different reasons, such as a request by one or more stakeholders, or a pressing food-related issue or emergency to be discussed or addressed.

The agenda is most commonly defined by the leadership but it can also be drafted collaboratively (both approaches are taken in 6 of the 10 cases studied). Respondents in only 6 out of the 10 cases report that the agenda includes a defined purpose, topic and questions to be addressed during the meeting.

In order to have inclusive and constructive dialogue, a facilitator is appointed for each meeting in almost all the SFS MSMs (9 out of 10). In 8 of the 10, stakeholders are informed and briefed beforehand on the topics under discussion and there is a note-taker and reporter; in 6 out of 10 cases, a report is circulated to all stakeholders after the meeting and there is a system in place to work collaboratively and give feedback on the minutes of the dialogue. Only in 4 of the 10 cases are stakeholders given a fixed time to participate or respond and the participation time is

equal for all stakeholders, which may imply a problem in terms of tipping the power balance when it comes to dialogue and meetings, reinforcing previous findings in this regard.

As shown in Figure 17, a large majority of stakeholders consider meetings to be well organized (84 per cent) and communication to be transparent, clear and effective (83 per cent). In contrast, when it comes to their perception of issues related to equal participation and the management of power relations, a slightly lower number of respondents (but still the majority) think that most of the (formal) members actively participate in the work of the SFS MSM (75 per cent), that the structure and processes are conducive to addressing food systems trade-offs in a consensual

collaborative way (74 per cent), that the structure and processes are conducive to the equal representation and participation of all members (71 per cent) and that the participatory learning processes in place are conducive to the capacity building of its members (69 per cent).

The overall perception of the quality and effectiveness of meetings and dialogue is positive, as 84 per cent of the stakeholders consider the effectiveness of the SFS MSM to foster inclusive and constructive dialogue between all food system stakeholders to be medium to very high. Similarly, 86 per cent believe that the SFS MSM's effectiveness in promoting collaborative and coordinated action between all food system stakeholders is medium to very high.

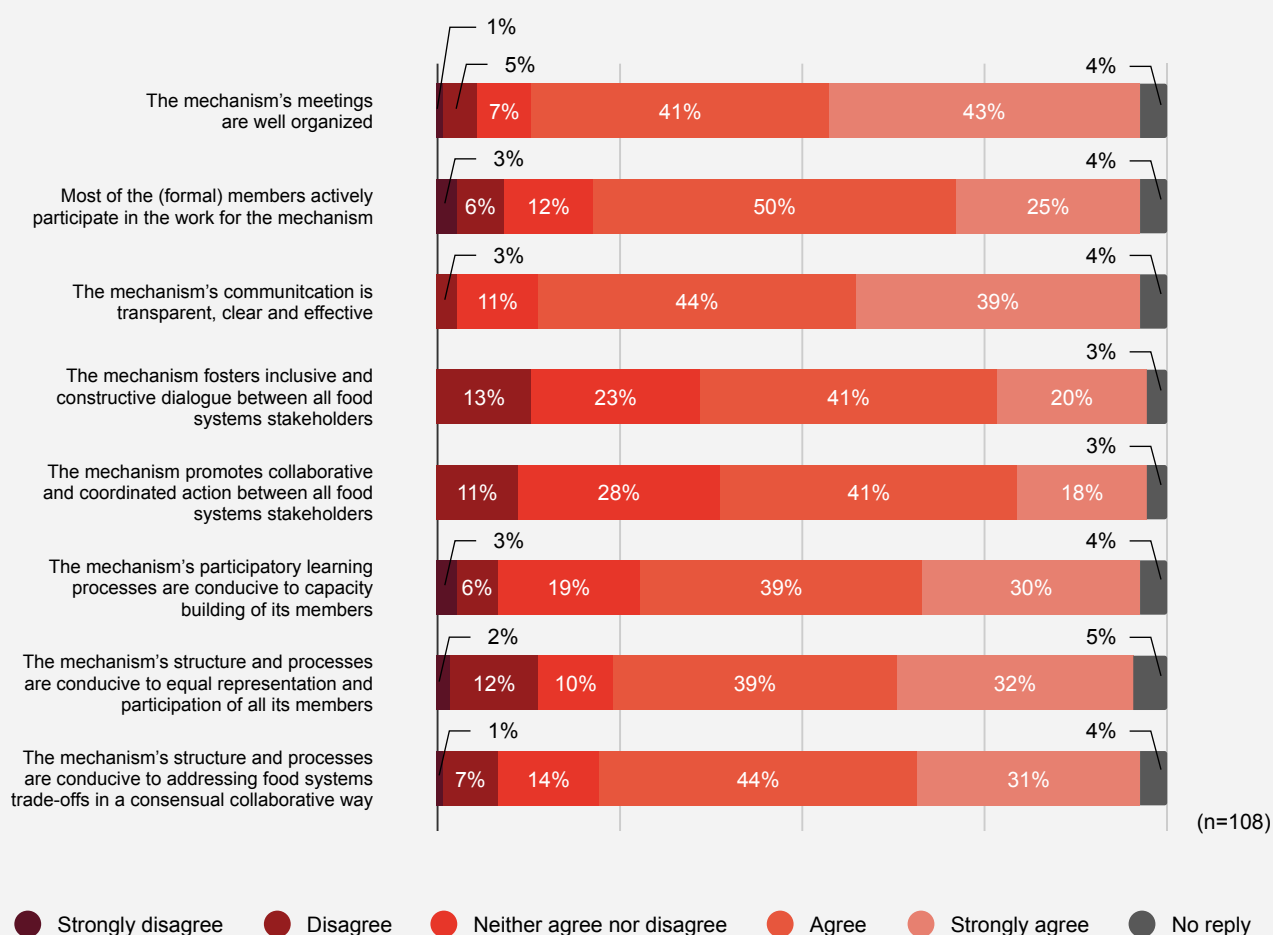


Figure 17. Stakeholders' perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of meetings and dialogue

4. Stakeholder engagement



Image credit: Fundación Alternativas

Some caution is warranted in interpreting results related to stakeholder engagement, as those who agreed to participate in the survey are likely to have a strong interest in SFS MSMs, giving rise to a self-selection bias and a possible over-representation of very engaged stakeholders and a potential under-representation of other views.

4.1. High level of participation, diverse forms of engagement

The stakeholders who responded to the survey show a high level of engagement: 70 per cent of them participate in all SFS MSM meetings with, on average, a higher attendance rate for civil society representatives (82 per cent) and farmers (71 per cent), and a slightly lower rate for government representatives (63 per cent) and NGOs (65 per cent). Plenary meetings are, for almost all stakeholders (89

per cent), the preferred way to participate in the SFS MSM; 61 per cent also communicate in writing and 44 per cent use verbal exchanges and feedback. It is interesting to note that the means of engagement used shows some variation, depending on the stakeholder group considered. For instance, public and private sector representatives engage more frequently than the other stakeholders in conversations (60 and 68 per cent, respectively). In contrast, verbal communication is used less by farmers (14 per cent) and civil society representatives (29 per cent). This higher use of informal oral exchanges by the actors traditionally considered more powerful in MSMs (private sector, international NGOs and public sector) could reflect a more active use of (informal) lobbying and information collection and exchange to advance their interests and influence the agenda and the priorities of the SFS MSM. Indeed, personal exchanges over the telephone are a widely recognized lobbying strategy (ICCO, 2010). Additionally, government representatives also

show a higher than average level of engagement via written feedback (74 per cent, 13 points higher than average). This finding seems to reinforce the idea that public sector representatives are highly engaged and take an active role in the SFS MSMs studied to position the government's agenda, and they do so through different engagement mechanisms and interactions (lobbying avenues).

In terms of time, almost half of the stakeholders (47 per cent) dedicate an average of 1 to 4 hours per month to the work of the SFS MSM. In 19 per cent of the cases, the time dedicated is lower; in 12 per cent of the cases, it is 4 to 8 hours, and in 19 per cent it is even more than 8 hours. The pattern of time dedicated to the SFS MSM is similar for most stakeholder groups, with the exception of farmers: 43 per cent of them stated they dedicate less than one hour per month to the SFS MSM, showing less time commitment than average. If we relate this one finding to the others in this study, we could presume that this may be due either to a lack of resources to finance their participation or to a lower level of interest in the SFS MSM, which is linked to what they gain from it.

4.2. Participation influenced by the power of money

In most cases (7 out of 10), the stakeholders' participation in the SFS MSM is financially supported by the organization to which they belong. This means that, in general, the SFS MSM has no budget to finance stakeholder participation. This in turn means that the participating organizations must be convinced about the value and potential of the SFS MSM's work, and also have sufficient funding available to participate. Moreover, in 18 per cent of the cases, participation is funded by the stakeholder's personal budget. This percentage is much higher among farmers, where 57 per cent of respondents stated that they have to finance their own participation, and 43 per cent indicated that they are supported by their organization's budget. This makes sense, as farmers are usually part of a farming business or work as independent workers. In the case of civil society, it is also more common than average to have participants funding their own participation (24 per cent) while 54 per cent are supported by their organizations. Only in 3 of the cases is there an SFS MSM budget to financially support the participation of stakeholders. This might hinder the representativeness and legitimacy of the SFS MSM, as a lack of institutional funding may deter the participation of more disadvantaged groups, who additionally usually have less power and influence on decision-making.

Real multi-stakeholder governance requires a counterweight to the power of money. The findings

suggest that it would be beneficial for most of the SFS MSMs to put in place funding mechanisms to support participation and to prevent a lack of resources from being an impediment to inclusiveness. In fact, some of the stakeholders surveyed indicated that more representation by grassroots organizations is needed in their SFS MSM.

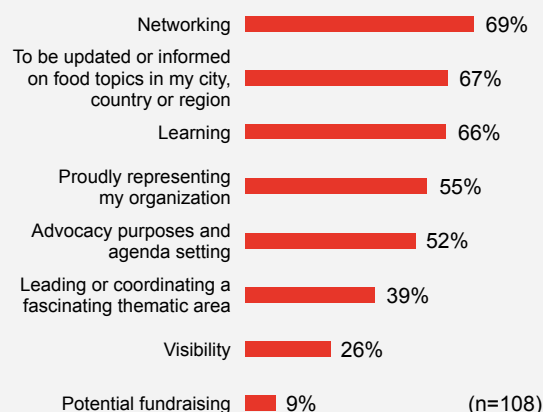


Figure 18. Stakeholders' main motivations for engaging in the SFS MSM (multiple answers possible)

4.3. Strong motivations and political buy-in

The top three motivations reported by respondents for participating in their SFS MSM are shown in Figure 18. These are: networking, being updated on food topics in their city/country, and learning. Surprisingly, only 9 per cent of respondents mentioned potential fundraising as one of their motivations for engaging in the SFS MSM.

Almost half of the respondents also indicated that the possibility to influence the agenda and the opportunity to represent their organizations were strong incentives for engagement.

On the quality of networking among members, reflected in Figure 19, the majority believe that the processes in place in their SFS MSM help build relationships among members (85 per cent) and that joining the mechanism has helped members build trust with one another (77 per cent) and to coordinate efforts among participants' organizations (75 per cent).

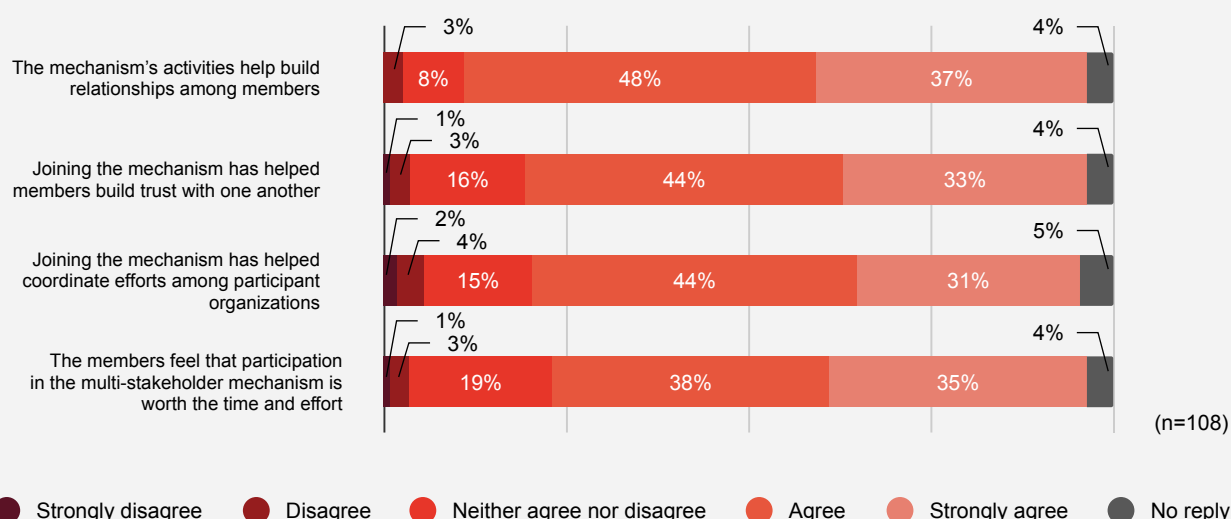


Figure 19. Stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of networking

An interesting point is that, in the open-ended question related to the reasons for participating in the mechanism, respondents expressed quite strongly the importance of their personal intrinsic motivations, related to their ideals, principles, feelings and personal stories around food. Words such as “pleasure”, “passion”, “justice”, “equity” and “sustainability” were used by several respondents.

In general terms, the majority of stakeholders (73 per cent) feel that participation in their SFS MSM is worth the time and effort, as shown in Figure 20.

Stakeholders participating in the survey perceive a good level of participation, endorsement and support from the government, including from high-level representatives.³⁰ Some 83 per cent of respondents

Participants feel that the participation in the multi-stakeholder mechanism is worth the time and effort

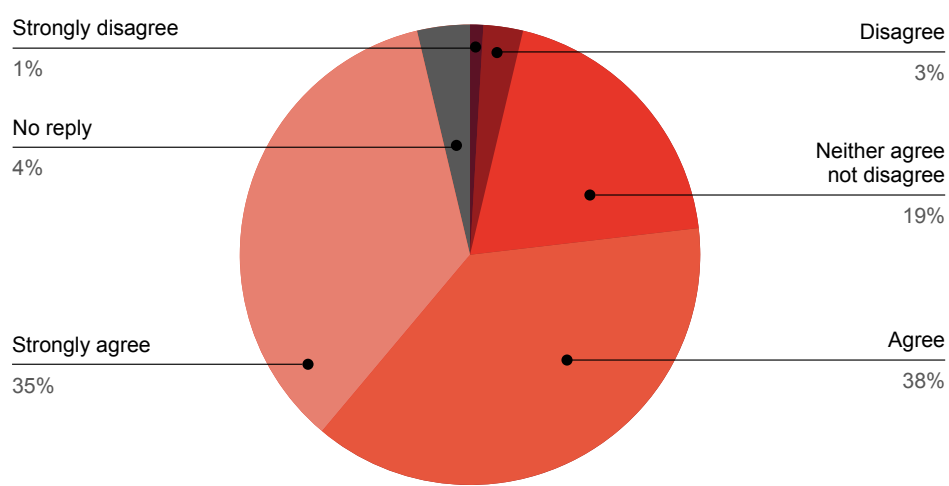


Figure 20. Stakeholders' perceptions of the worthiness of the SFS MSM

³⁰There might be a bias here coming from the fact that having government support and engagement was one of the criteria for selection of the SFS MSMs included in this study.

rate this level of buy-in from medium to very high, with almost half of respondents (49 per cent) perceiving a medium level of buy-in. Undoubtedly, this perceived good level of government support has been critical for the long-term functioning of these MSMs and the concrete results they have achieved.

Similarly, the general level of stakeholder engagement is perceived as medium to very high in 94 per cent of responses, as shown in Figure 21. Interestingly, when asked about the level of engagement by stakeholder groups, the perceptions vary considerably, especially in the case of the private sector and farmers, where this percentage drops to 63 and 61 per cent, respectively. Some stakeholders reported that they perceive these stakeholder groups as less collaborative and “more focused on their interests and the individual or organizational gains they can get from the SFS MSM than in seeing the big picture and joining forces”.

In general terms, stakeholders appear to genuinely engage in the SFS MSM to learn and stay updated and in touch with the different food systems actors and topics. Their openness to learning, engaging in collaborative work and supporting social, economic, and political transformation seems to be quite high. When asked about the perceived level of resistance of the SFS MSM to transformative change,³¹ 75 per cent of respondents said it is medium to very low, with

almost half of the respondents (44 per cent) perceiving a medium level of resistance. It is also worth noting that a not insignificant number of stakeholders indicated a high to very high level of resistance in this area (13 and 8 per cent, respectively). The private sector (including farmers) is perceived as the stakeholder group with the highest resistance to transformative change. In some cases, public sector decision-makers also seem “more comfortable maintaining the status quo” and are perceived as “not prepared to shift the paradigm and implement models, infrastructure or capital that will empower individuals and communities, specifically in regard to food sovereignty”.

4.4. Effective collaborative leadership is paramount

Getting people to work together to achieve common goals is never easy. Collaboration is especially challenging when there are diverse and competing interests, perspectives and values at stake, within different organizational and cultural contexts. Leadership styles and capacities have a profound influence on the direction that SFS MSMs take (Brouwer et al, 2015). Leadership is a crucial building block for the success of SFS MSMs. The dependence on effective leadership can be considered a limitation of this kind of governance mechanism.

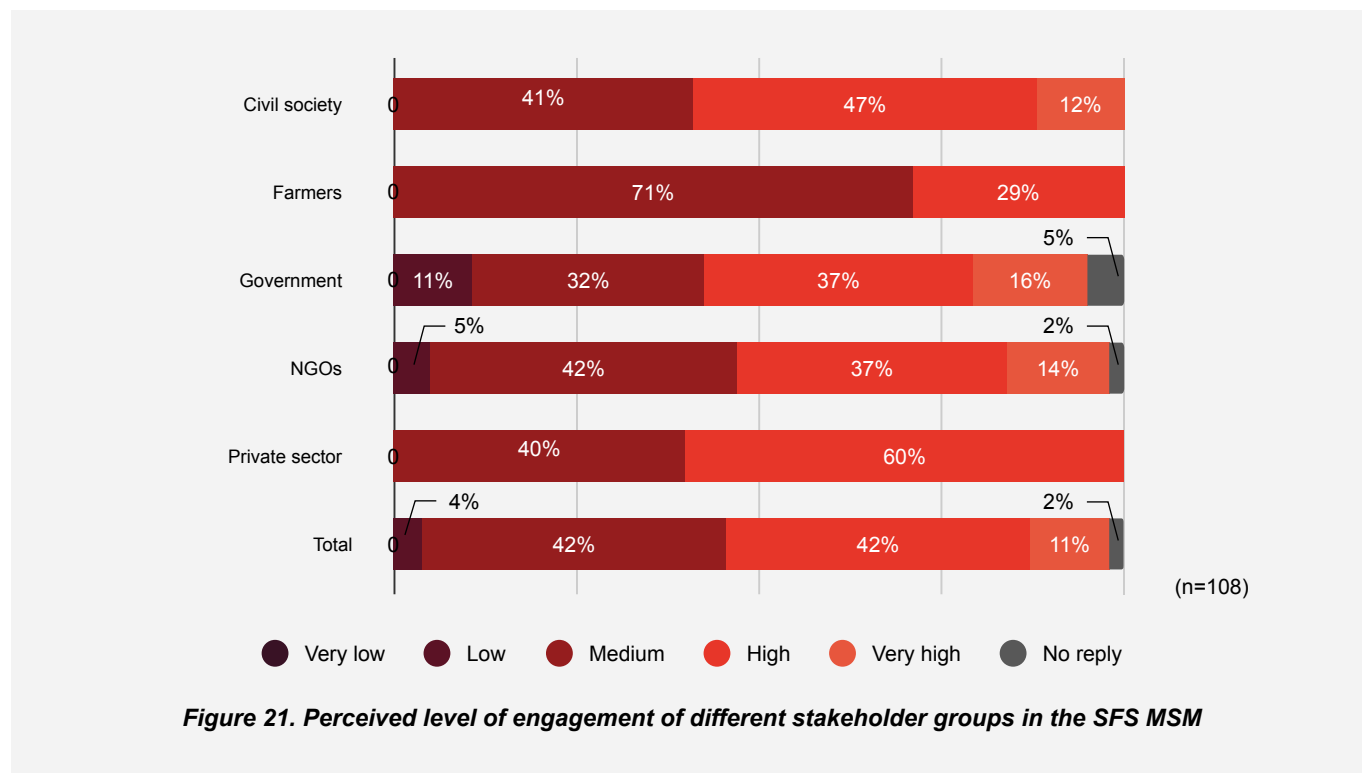


Figure 21. Perceived level of engagement of different stakeholder groups in the SFS MSM

³¹“Transformative change” was defined in the survey as “doing things differently, not just a little more or less of something already being done. It entails holistic collaborative work and addressing root causes to achieve sustainable food systems”.

A strong collaborative leadership style encourages people to work together, sharing responsibility and becoming empowered to tackle difficult issues. The perceptions of the stakeholder survey respondents regarding their SFS MSM's leadership are positive, as shown in Figure 22. In general, most stakeholders agree or strongly agree that the leadership shares decision-making power with the SFS MSM's members (82 per cent), is receptive to new ideas (88 per cent), adequately reflects members inputs in the SFS MSM's documents and products (84 per cent), encourages all members to participate (85 per cent) and is actively involved in welcoming new members (88 per cent). As a result, most of the stakeholders think that their SFS MSM promotes and supports diverse representation and participation (81 per cent) and that it also provides opportunities for members to build leadership skills (71 per cent).

In contrast, perceptions regarding the leadership's ability to manage disagreements and power relations are less positive. A lower percentage of respondents agree or strongly agree that the leadership has a good mechanism in place to resolve disagreement (49 per cent), and to manage conflicts of interest (55 per cent) and power relations (56 per cent). These perceptions are consistent with previous findings on this issue, suggesting that even successful SFS MSMs

still have to improve their leadership and governance arrangements in order to level the playing field for all participants, and create safe spaces for disadvantaged groups, so that they do not replicate existing unequal power relations in the food systems they aim to transform.

Some respondents mentioned concrete negative consequences arising from this, such as "the difficulty in counterbalancing the weight of private sector actors, such as the big retailers and the food industry, while elevating the interests of consumers". Additionally, in some cases where the leadership role is occupied by the public sector, it is not uncommon to see more hierarchical leadership styles, which, according to some stakeholders, may hold actors back from meaningfully engaging in the SFS MSM. In other cases, the leadership is perceived as too weak to manage power relations or lacking the weight and legitimacy needed to convene and encourage engagement. Finally, weaknesses in leadership were sometimes also attributed to a lack of vision and strategy in relation to the food system itself and the role that the MSM could play to advance sustainable food systems. "Shared values with the rest of the group, enthusiasm, optimism and celebration of joint results" were attributes mentioned as an important part of good MSM leadership.

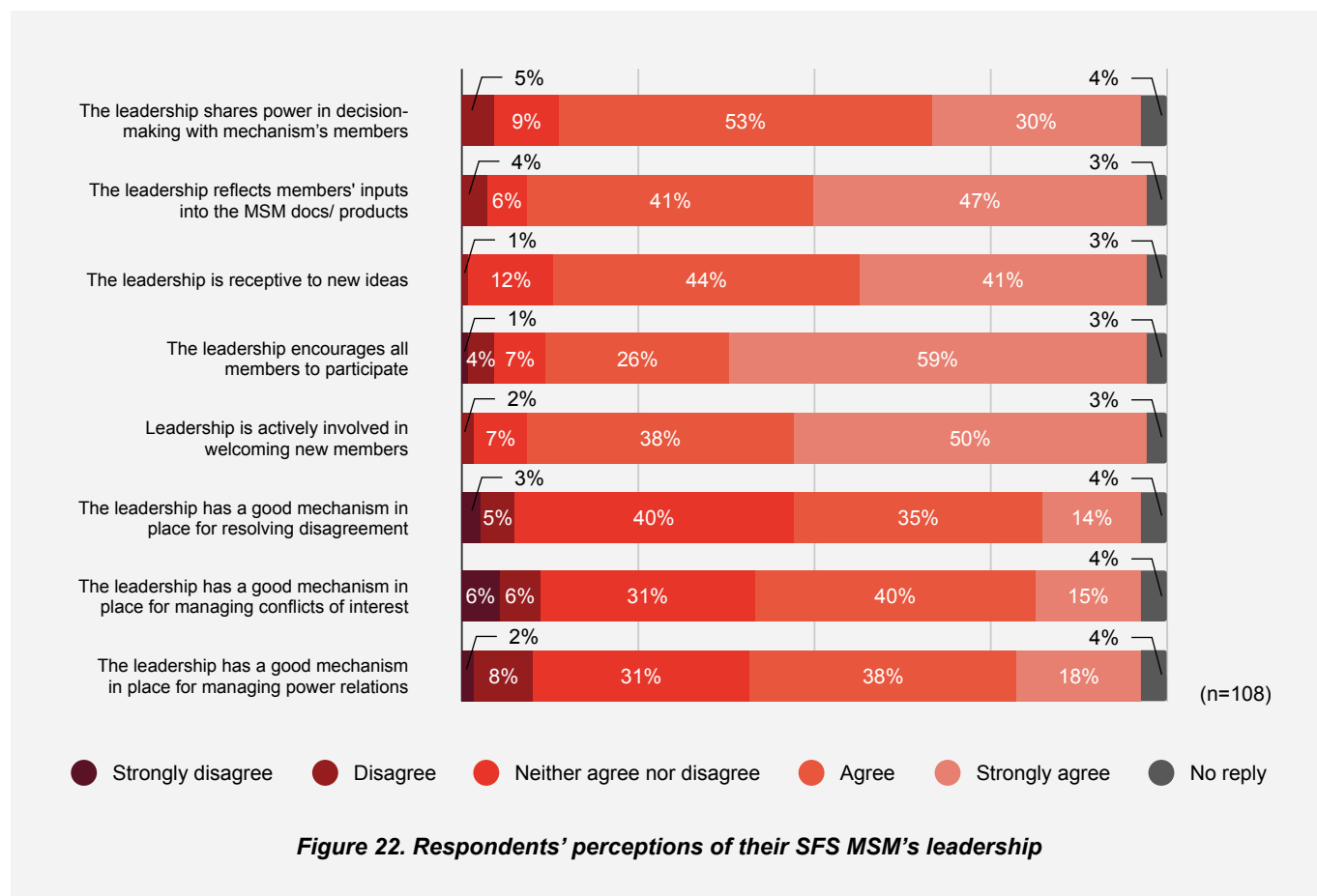


Figure 22. Respondents' perceptions of their SFS MSM's leadership

5. Lessons learned from policy formulation and implementation

5.1. A twofold success in embedding the SFS approach in policy processes

All of the SFS MSMs studied, with the exception of Eat Right India and the Antananarivo FPC,³² have led and/or informed the formulation of at least one food policy, regulation, strategy, action plan or roadmap for sustainable food systems (see Chapter 3 for more details on each case). In 7 of the cases included in this study, this policy has been enacted³³ by public authorities and thus recognized as the official policy document for sustainable food systems development in the country or city.

An interesting and important finding is that, in addition to the contribution to the formulation of the food policy, 9 of the SFS MSMs have provided input and/or helped to include the food topic in other related agendas and policy processes. In particular, they have contributed to policy formulation related to climate change, environmental issues and territorial and urban development.

For instance, Organic Denmark is co-author of the world's first GMO Law and the world's first Organic Law; eight additional action plans, including climate and organic conversion goals in public kitchens; the world's first Organic Action Plan and national organic label; and the Climate Partnership for the Food and Agriculture Sector. Moreover, at an international level, Organic Denmark was co-lead on the EU ban on GMOs in organic food and farming and was a contributor to the EU Organic Action Plan, the EU organic regulation and the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration³⁴ (World Mayors Summit 2019).³⁵ Organic Denmark has also



³²The mechanism has not yet developed such a food policy/regulation/strategy/action plan/roadmap in a collaborative manner. The first collaborative strategy will be the product of the SARU (CRFS) project led by FAO Madagascar (2020-2022). It is a strategy to strengthen the resilience of the food system in the urban region of Antananarivo (for more information, see Chapter 3).

³³Made official law or policy.

³⁴https://www.c40.org/press_releases/good-food-cities

³⁵<https://c40summit2019.org/>

successfully lobbied to embed sustainable organic food policies in larger national programmes and strategies for rural development, drinking water protection, pesticide control, green growth, and national, regional and city budgets. Similarly, in France, the National Food Council (Conseil National de l'Alimentation, CNA) has issued 87 opinions (avis), feeding into a large number of food-related policy processes (see Annex 5). Likewise, in Quito, the Pacto Agroalimentario de Quito (PAQ) has successfully lobbied to add the food topic to Quito's Climate Action Plan 2050, Vision 2040 (city urban planning strategy), Quito's Resilience Strategy, the Metropolitan Development Plan and the Land Use Plan.

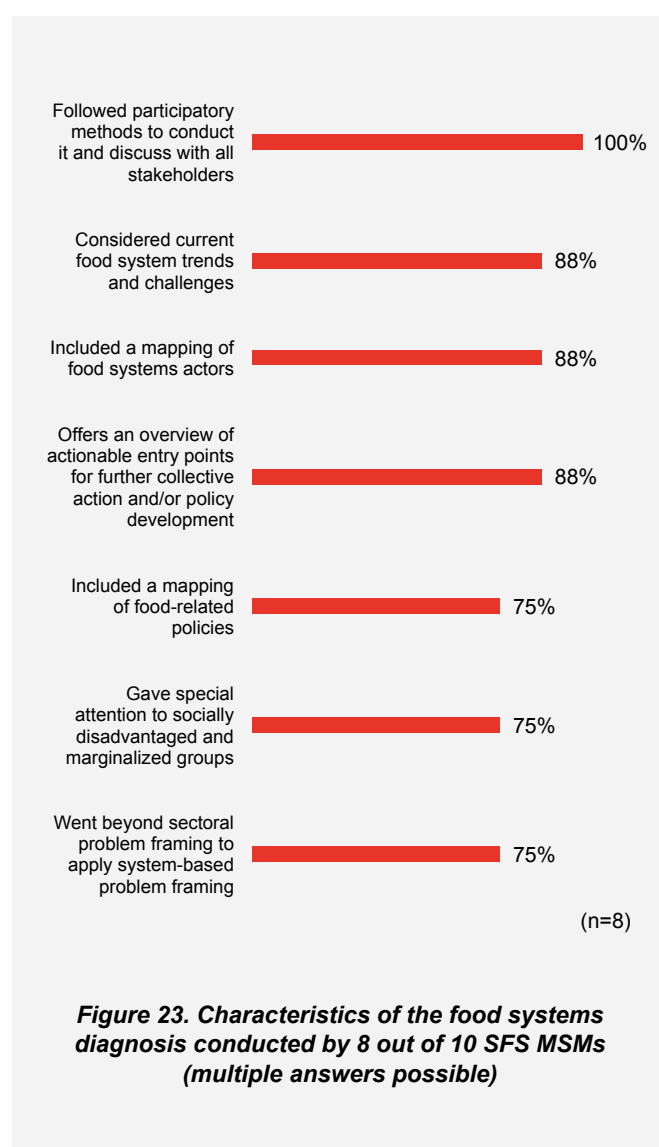
This is what adopting a food systems approach means: it is not only about formulating a holistic sustainable food policy, but also about having policies in different areas (e.g. agriculture, fisheries, environment, public health) that take a more holistic view of the objectives and coordinate to avoid incoherent policies (OECD, 2021).

5.2. The first step: a holistic participatory food systems diagnosis

Experts and organizations working on food systems transformation have developed several manuals, toolkits and frameworks to provide guidance on how to foster sustainable food systems by applying a food systems approach to policy-making and implementation.³⁶ These recommendations highlight the importance of conducting a holistic participatory food systems assessment as a starting point. This diagnosis forms the basis for further development of policies and programmes to promote the sustainability and resilience of the food system, and stems from a formalized process of identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders from the beginning of the process. Beyond the formulation or revision of food policies, this results in the creation and revitalization of existing networks for food governance and policy development (FAO, RUAF and WLU, 2018).

A large majority of the SFS MSMs studied (8 out of 10) conducted an assessment aimed at understanding the current functioning and performance of the food system in their geographical context. As shown in Figure 23, all these diagnoses used participatory methods, and 7 out of 8 took into account current food systems trends and challenges; included a mapping of food systems actors; and identified actionable entry points

for further collective action and policy development. Finally, 6 out of 8 included a mapping of food-related policies in the diagnosis, gave special attention to socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and went beyond sectoral problem framing to apply a system-based problem framing. These results indicate that the food systems approach is increasingly being adopted in these SFS MSMs, but the sectoral approach still prevails in 4 of the 10 cases studied. The same happens with the prioritization of social groups who are most in need – this is absent in 4 of the 10 SFS MSMs. This finding may reinforce the need to step up the participation, voices and needs of less powerful groups, and further improve stakeholder power dynamics in these SFS MSMs.



³⁶For instance, the CRFS toolkit (FAO, RUAF and WLU, 2018), the Collaborative Framework for Food Systems Transformation (UNEP, 2019a) and the Food Systems Decision-support Toolbox (Posthumus et al., 2021).



Image credit: Organic Denmark

5.3. A whole-of-society approach advanced through innovations in policy formulation

All the SFS MSMs engaged in policy development use a blended approach to inform food policy formulation, combining deliberative and participatory democracy methods. The process usually includes initial broad public consultations through open, self-selected participation. In a second phase, the SFS MSM stakeholders engage in internal deliberation to develop final policy proposals and recommendations. The methodologies and tools used to foster participation show a high level of innovation, varying from case to case and depending on the policy at hand. For instance, SFS MSMs often create thematic working groups to deal with specific issues, and they usually reach out to targeted stakeholders and experts outside the SFS MSM for specific processes.

In order to carry out the consultations, the SFS MSMs make use of focus groups, workshops, interviews with key stakeholders, consultation events and meetings with actors outside the SFS MSM. These tools can be used in combination, or at different stages of the process. When it comes to promoting innovative approaches, the cases of Montreal, France, Los Angeles and Ghent deserve particular attention.

In Montreal, the Conseil du Système alimentaire montréalais (CSAM) established four working groups for the strategic planning that led to the 2020-2022 action plan. These thematic groups comprised members of the CSAM as well as invited experts on each priority topic; other stakeholders outside the SFS MSM were also consulted when deemed necessary. A forum was organized with 170 participants to share the state of play regarding each priority topic, and to define actions. Drawing from all the input and information

gathered, the working groups identified objectives for the food action plan, which were subsequently adopted by the SFS MSM. The final stage was a call for proposals that resulted in the selection of 92 projects supported by more than 50 food systems actors, which were included in the food action plan.

In the case of France, the CNA is currently piloting a citizen participation system³⁷ where a specific dialogue group is created within the SFS MSM. This group interacts with a citizen panel and integrates input from exploratory workshops open to citizens and supported by communities. Citizens' opinions and the summaries of the workshops are made public and presented alongside the opinions (avis) of the CNA concertation group. In this way, the CNA's recommendations incorporate the views of the entire citizenry, thus ensuring a broader plurality of views.

In Los Angeles, LAFPC serves as a backbone organization for a network of over 400 institutions and agencies working on the promotion of healthy, sustainable and fair food. Growing from the collective impact model, they cultivate an ecosystem approach, building a diverse network of change makers from across the food system, from farm to fork and beyond. They do this through cross-sector working groups, network events and other civic engagement activities.

Finally, in Ghent, the Gent en Garde FPC works with "transition arenas"³⁸ as a key process where new policy pathways are created in collaboration with multiple (frontrunner) stakeholders. The FPC has established a food working group that mobilizes those effectively working at grassroots level on the food transition by pursuing a contributory logic, where every actor has a voice. This combination of representative and contributory logic aims to reinforce the democracy and legitimacy of the work done by the Gent en Garde FPC.

³⁷<https://cna-alimentation.fr/debats-citoyens/>

³⁸<https://commonstransition.org/commons-transition-plan-city-ghent/>

5.4. SFS policy priorities and management of trade-offs

The information presented in the following four sub-sections (5.4, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7) is solely based on the data gathered through the focal points surveys of the 8 cases that have led and/or informed the development of an SFS food policy.³⁹

When a food systems diagnosis that included a policy mapping and analysis was conducted prior to policy formulation, it served as the main input to inform policy priorities (see Figure 24). Additionally, government concerns also played an important role in 50 per cent of these cases. Finally, half of the SFS MSM focal points recognize that differences in stakeholder representation and power affected levels of influence when defining the focus areas. Through the agenda-setting capacity, power seems to influence policy priorities, even in cases where these stemmed from a prior participatory process. Differently positioned actors have different capacities to define or influence the agenda by selecting issues seen as important or relevant or by shaping the way these issues are framed, discussed and interpreted. This finding reinforces the need to improve participatory and empowerment processes in SFS MSMs to balance the levels of influence of all actors. Participation does not necessarily entail influence, as some actors may be invited to participate, and yet not be involved or taken into account in decision-making. It is not possible to completely avoid a policy consultation and/or formulation process where groups organize and use their power to influence it. However, this becomes a problem when some special interests achieve a disproportionate influence, leading to policy capture (a situation where public policy is used to benefit a special interest at the expense of others in society) (OECD, 2021).

Trade-offs between the various sustainability dimensions of the food system (in particular between healthy diets, equitable socio-economic benefits and environmental sustainability) are unavoidable and need to be navigated explicitly when developing or implementing sustainable food system initiatives. Responses from the focal points surveyed mentioned dialogue, compromise, negotiation and consensus as key elements to navigate controversial and complex topics and to manage trade-offs. The MUFPP monitoring framework is used as a reference in some cases (in Quito's PAQ, for instance), to make decisions when there are tensions and disagreements and compromises must be reached.



Image credit: JAN U P R A S A D by Unsplash



Figure 24. Criteria to define SFS policy priorities (multiple answers possible)

³⁹Eat Right India and the Antananarivo FPC have not yet formulated a holistic sustainable food systems policy (See Chapter 3, Sections 1.3 and 2.7 for more information).

According to some of the stakeholders surveyed, when win-win decisions are not possible, economic interests (profit) tend to prevail over other aspects such as the environment and people's health. The private sector (including farmers) is usually blamed for this, and is also perceived as the stakeholder group with the strongest agenda-setting influence and the highest resistance to transformative change: "fighting hard to maintain the status quo", according to some respondents. In the case of Organic Denmark, organic farmers often take the lead on transformative change based on organic principles and dialogue with other member groups and with environmental, consumer, climate and animal welfare stakeholders. Their efforts are sometimes tempered, however, by economic constraints.

5.5. Key topics addressed by the SFS policies

While some synergies are possible, trade-offs and hard choices characterize work on food systems. When we look at the topics addressed in the SFS policies, the issues of "sustainable diets, food diversification and food environments" and "local food production and (peri-)urban farming" have been prioritized in all the cases (Figure 25). These two priority issues are

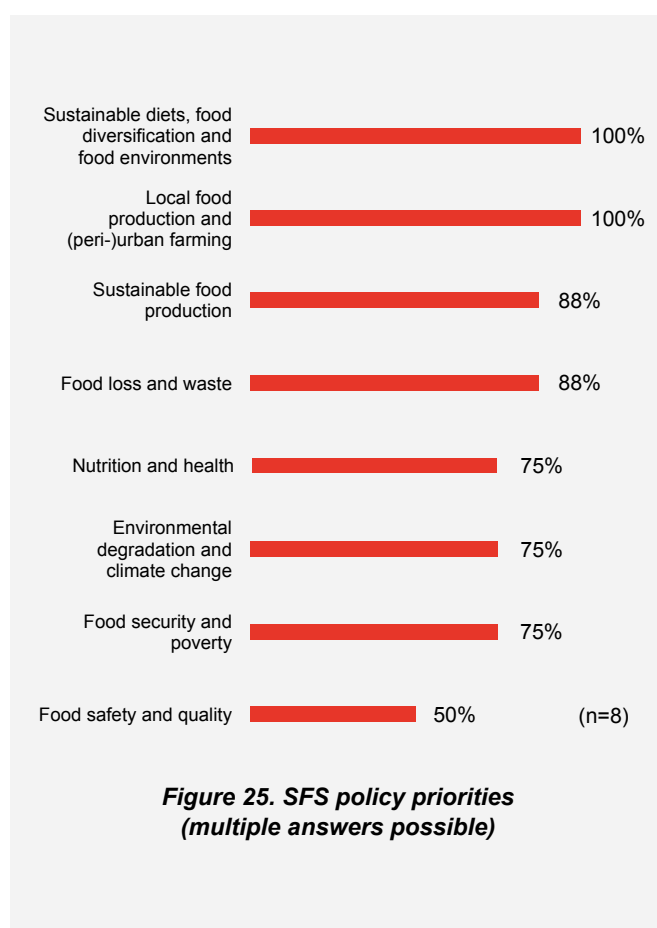


Image credit: Maarten van den Heuvel by Unsplash

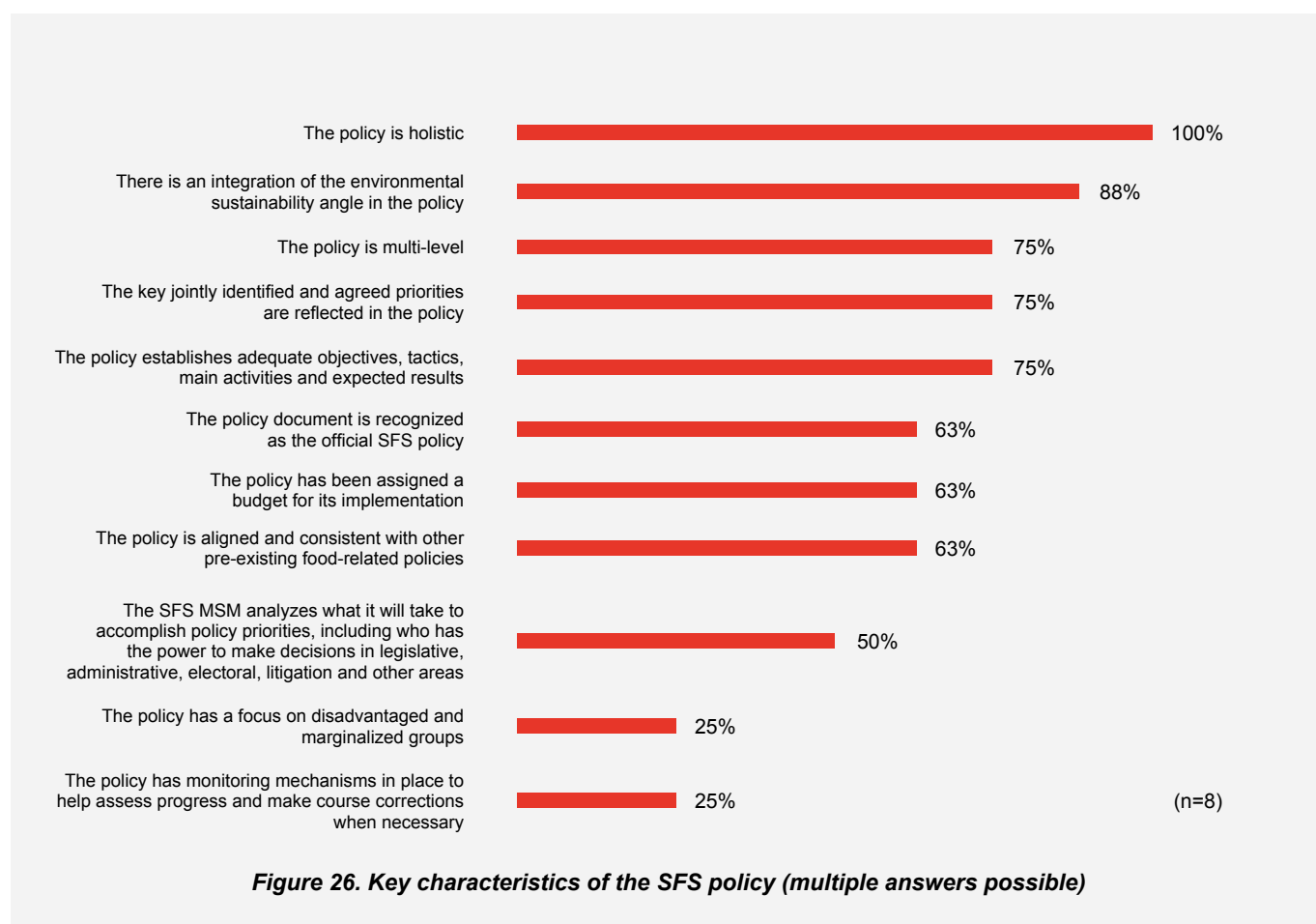
followed by “sustainable food production” and “food loss and waste”, indicated by 7 SFS MSMs. Finally, “nutrition and health”, “environmental degradation and climate change” and “food security and poverty” feature in 6 of the 8 food policies, and “food safety and quality” only in half of them.

Findings regarding the selection of priority areas show that, in general terms, we are looking at holistic policy examples, since they usually include a broad range of topics related to food systems, and not only, for example, the productive or health component. The prioritization of topics speaks to the inclusion of a more encompassing view, with topics such as “sustainable diets, food diversification and food environments” included in all the food policies developed by the cases studied. It would seem that, in the cases studied, a more systemic view has made its way into food-related policy-making, traditionally dominated by the agricultural production perspective. Interestingly, the reported policy priorities do not match exactly the “hot topics” addressed so far by the SFS MSMs (see Section 2.2). The SFS MSMs studied seem to be adopting a more holistic and integrative vision, which has been translated in 8 of the cases into their food

policies. This vision goes beyond agriculture and food production and brings to light other crucial food systems issues and challenges, in particular from an environmental sustainability perspective.

5.6. Key characteristics of the SFS policies

A policy for sustainable food systems strives to achieve improvements in economic, social and environmental outcomes. Figure 26 shows that all the eight focal points indicated that their SFS policy adopts a holistic, comprehensive approach that acknowledges the full spectrum of issues at stake. In particular, in 7 of the 8 cases, they reported that the environmental sustainability angle had been integrated. In 6 of the 8 cases, the policy reflects the jointly identified priorities, and it is multi-level and establishes adequate objectives, activities and expected results. In 5 of the 8 cases, the policy is aligned to pre-existing food-related policies, the document is recognized as the official policy for SFS development, and it has been assigned a budget for its implementation. In 4 of these cases,



the policy includes an analysis of what it will take to accomplish policy priorities, including who has the power to make decisions in legislative, administrative, electoral, litigation and other areas.

Finally, in only 2 of the 8 cases, the policy pays special attention to disadvantaged and marginalized groups and has monitoring mechanisms in place to help assess progress and make course corrections when necessary.

5.7. Implementation of the SFS policies

The SFS MSMs studied participate to some extent in the implementation of food policies. The level of engagement varies greatly, from an active role in coordinating activities and managing the budget (as in the case of Ghent) to only implementing some

communication activities and occasionally conducting monitoring and evaluation (as in the case of Quito).

In 6 of the cases studied, there is a public institution leading the implementation of the policy and coordinating with other departments and actors through direct cooperation and dialogue between civil servants, by sharing strategic plans and information, and sometimes through a shared budget (in only 3 of the cases).

Figure 27 shows that in the majority of the SFS MSMs studied (7 out of 8), implementation is reviewed in collaboration with different stakeholders, sharing information and lessons learned. In 6 out of the 8 cases, a budget is allocated for implementation, and pre-existing related plans, programmes and activities are taken into account for improved efficiency and efficacy. Only in half of the cases does the SFS MSM play a role in the decisions regarding the allocation of funds; in 3 out of 8 cases, there are monitoring

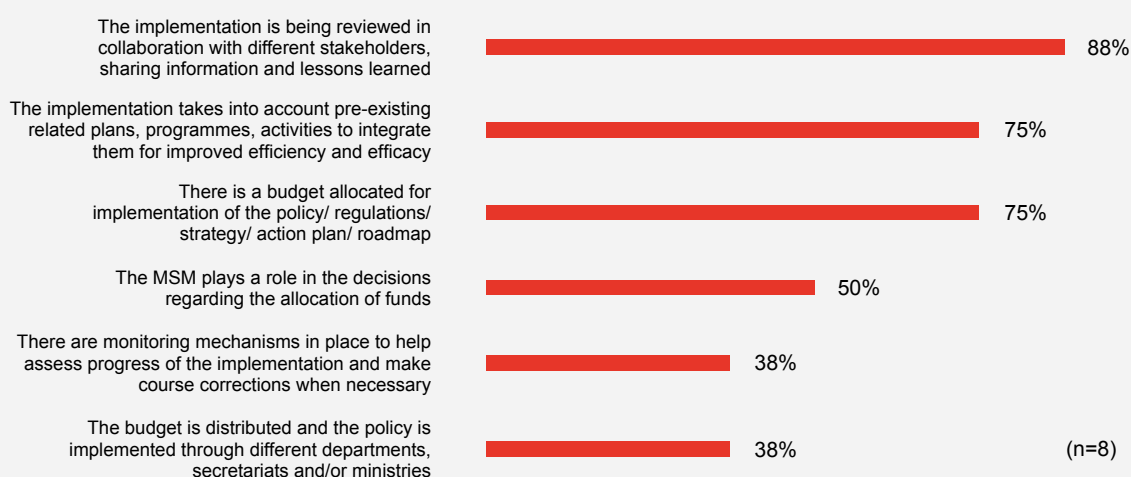


Figure 27. Key characteristics of SFS policy implementation (multiple answers possible)

mechanisms in place to help assess implementation progress and make course corrections when necessary.

Figure 28 shows that the most common roles played by the SFS MSMs in relation to policy implementation are communication, execution of activities and monitoring and evaluation. These are followed by project management and coordination of activities. Only in half of the cases do SFS MSMs engage in the mobilization of funds, and only in 2 cases do they also administer funds.

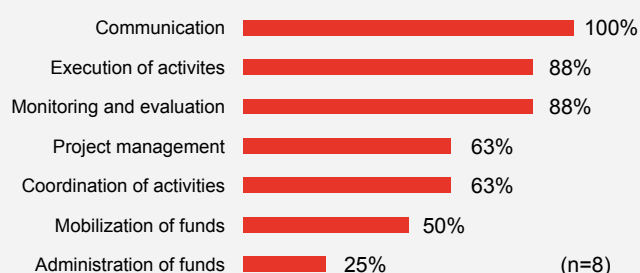


Figure 28. Roles of the SFS MSM in policy implementation (multiple answers possible)

6. Perceived achievements and challenges

6.1. Perceived achievements

The success of the MSMs reviewed hinges on their capacity to lead change collectively and achieve concrete results in terms of the promotion of sustainable food systems. Survey participants were asked to identify the three key achievements of their SFS MSM. As shown in Figure 29, “networking of food stakeholders” is the key achievement indicated by the largest number of participants surveyed (58 per cent). Networking increases connectivity among food systems actors and their capacity for action. In recent assessments of the impacts of COVID-19 responses, this networking facilitated swift action and was very important in putting in place immediate food distribution, local marketing and other related measures (RUAF, 2020a; Blay-Palmer et al., 2021). Results related to policy formulation follow, both in terms of “food policy formulation” (42 per cent of respondents) and “providing input to policies, strategies or action plans” (46 per cent).

If we examine the responses by stakeholder groups, “generating new concrete collaborations and projects” also stood out as a concrete achievement perceived by private sector participants (40 per cent), NGOs (49 per cent) and government (42 per cent). Additionally, “providing sound advice for policy-making” was also indicated as a key result for many, especially for farmers (43 per cent) and civil society (35 per cent).

Not surprisingly, only a marginal 13 per cent of respondents regarded “addressing food systems trade-offs” as a key achievement of their SFS MSM.

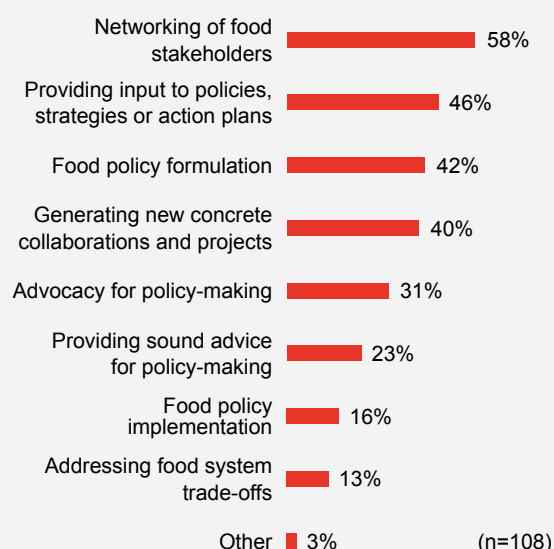


Figure 29. Perceived major concrete achievements of the SFS MSM (Respondents could choose up to three options)

In contrast, as shown in Figure 30, perceptions are mixed when it comes to the SFS MSM's responsiveness in supporting effective decisions and interventions in the context of COVID-19. The overall perception of participants is of a medium level of effectiveness in dealing with the consequences of

the pandemic in the food system. A more negative perception was reported by the private sector, civil society and NGOs, with 40 per cent, 30 per cent and 28 per cent of respondents, respectively, rating the effectiveness of the SFS MSM's response as low or very low.

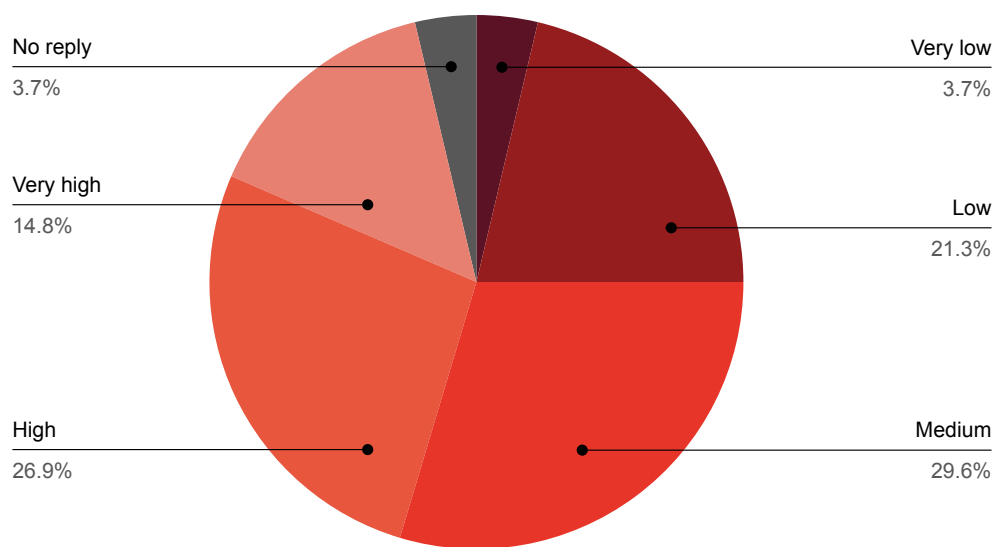


Figure 30. Perceived responsiveness of the SFS MSM in supporting effective decisions and interventions in the context of COVID-19

6.2. Perceived drivers of collaboration and success

Understanding which factors play the most important role in facilitating collaboration will help existing and future SFS MSMs optimally design their structure and governance to foster inclusive and effective exchanges, promote collaborative work and achieve positive results. When asked about their perceptions of the dominant drivers of successful multi-stakeholder collaboration, participants underscored four key elements related to good governance practices in the SFS MSM: the balanced representation of all food systems actors (64 per cent), conducive leadership and governance (62 per cent), trust built upon many years of networking and collaborating (61 per cent) and perceived political support (44 per cent). Interestingly, Figure 31 shows that participants do not consider that being duty-bound to work together (by a regulation and/or an institutional commitment or accountability obligation) necessarily has a positive impact on collaboration.

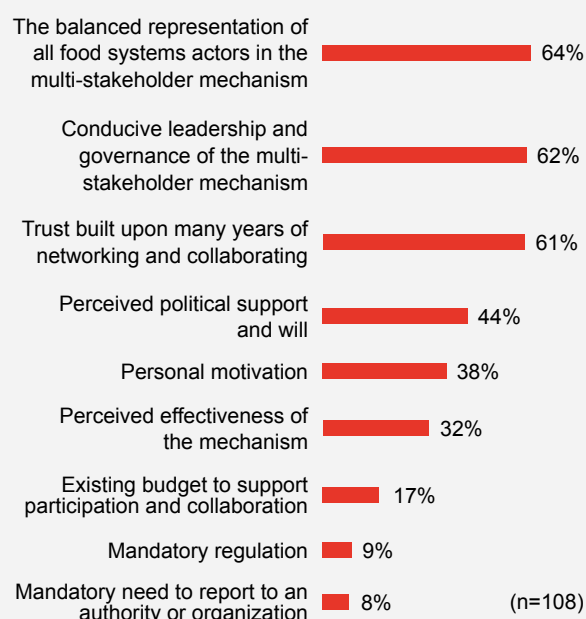


Figure 31. Perceived main drivers of collaboration in the SFS MSM (multiple answers possible)

6.3. Perceived challenges

One of the main challenges facing SFS MSMs is ensuring their long-term durability (RUAF and Hivos, 2019). This requires financial stability, as identified by the majority of respondents and by the majority of SFS MSMs (India, Denmark, London, Los Angeles, Quito, La Paz and Antananarivo), as shown in Figure 32. The stakeholder survey results show a variety of views in relation to other perceived challenges. Many respondents also pointed to the lack of political support and the limited time to engage in additional activities as major obstacles faced by their SFS MSM. At the other end of the spectrum, Figure 32 also shows that most respondents do not think that issues such as the juniority of the SFS MSM, weak leadership or lack of a clear agenda hold back collaboration. Nevertheless, according to some of the stakeholders surveyed, frequent changes in the SFS MSM's participants could hinder progress. This seems to be the case especially when the government representative is replaced. In addition to the importance of long-term relationships for trust, a common understanding and continued progress, generating a common understanding (and language) around the food system is key to the good functioning of these SFS MSMs. Changing participants can slow or even reverse that process.

In addition to the funding issue, one of the reasons why the cases studied have been successful and have shown long-term durability is their ability to overcome or avoid the most common obstacles that can cause SFS MSMs to dissolve. For instance, they have avoided depending on one strong personality, organization or political figure, focusing on one single issue, having narrow policy goals or over-committing to specific programmes, often referred to in the literature as “red flags” to watch out for (Harper et al., 2009).

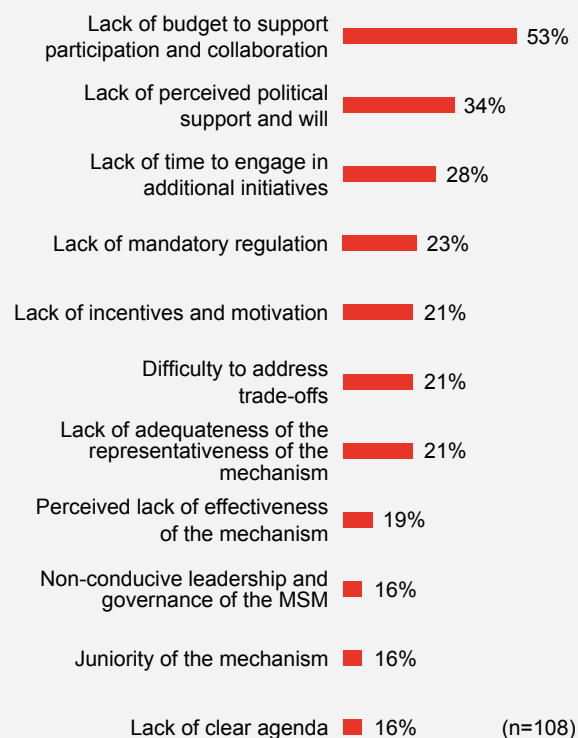


Figure 32. Perceived key challenges faced by the SFS MSM (multiple answers possible)



Image credit: Jason Rubens / WWF