



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



Image credit: Pavan Trikutam by Unsplash

Introduction

1. Multi-stakeholder mechanisms and participatory governance

1.1. Benefits and limitations of multi-stakeholder governance

The increasing complexity of the global problems facing humankind and the lack of effectiveness in addressing them have prompted national and sub-national governments to explore new approaches to policy-making. Evidence shows that participation can provide better policies, strengthen democracy and build trust (OECD, 2020).

In recent years, interest in and support for **participatory governance** has grown. The term “participation” can be defined as “the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (Bhatnagar et al., 1996). It is used to cover a very wide range of disparate activities and can convey different meanings (Pateman, 2012). The central assertion is that legitimate policy decisions should involve those affected by them, not just experts or elites (Dryzek (2001) and Leighninger (2006), both cited in Hendriks, 2017). Participatory processes are also useful in accessing people’s

knowledge and resources, and in encouraging cooperation and efficient implementation of policies (Hendriks, 2017). However, participation is not the same as consultation and listening. It requires processes in which the stakeholders themselves generate, share and analyse information, establish priorities, specify objectives, develop and sometimes also implement strategies (World Bank, 1996).

Since the 1990 “deliberative turn” (Dryzek, 2002), deliberation is an increasingly used form of participation (Pateman, 2012). The central idea behind **deliberative governance**⁷ is that relatively small but representative groups of people (e.g. institutions, agencies, groups, activists) can achieve better deliberation and results than large numbers of people. Deliberative processes include citizens’ assemblies, juries, panels, boards and councils. In these processes, stakeholders spend time learning and collaborating to develop informed collective recommendations for public authorities. These structures and processes are rooted in the democratic principles of deliberation, representativeness and impact (OECD, 2020). Deliberation requires specific conditions for participants

⁷In democratic theory, the participatory democracy approach involves large numbers of people in political processes, ideally the entire citizenry, i.e. everyone affected by a particular decision. In contrast, the deliberative democracy approach involves relatively small (but representative) groups of people, in order to achieve deep deliberation (difficult among large numbers of people). There is generally a trade-off between large numbers of participants and in-depth participation.

to engage in real dialogue to carefully and openly discuss and weigh up evidence about an issue. For example, trust in established processes and the ability to express views openly are paramount. These can be hindered by power asymmetries, one of the difficulties most frequently cited in achieving effective deliberation when participants have very different power sources (OECD, 2020). This issue will be addressed later in this report (see Chapters 3.4 and 4.2).

Multi-stakeholder governance is one kind of deliberative governance. It is increasingly recognized as one way forward in the participatory governance of complex global challenges (Gleckman, 2018), such as achieving sustainable food systems. It has gained recognition since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.⁸ One assumption behind multistakeholderism is that multiple “stakeholders” are legitimate actors in governance (Gleckman, 2018). Moreover, it is commonly believed that different groups can share a common problem or ambition, while having different interests, perspectives or “stakes”, and that by bringing these stakeholders together to work collaboratively, they can make concerted decisions and take action for their common good (Brouwer et al., 2019). In multi-stakeholder governance structures, each stakeholder contributes with its experience, knowledge and expertise (Brouwer et al., 2015).

Multi-stakeholder governance is usually fostered within a broader **whole-of-society approach**. This approach acknowledges the contribution of, and important role played by all relevant stakeholders, including individuals, families and communities, intergovernmental organizations and religious institutions, civil society, academia, the media, voluntary associations, the private sector, and industry, regardless of whether they work collaboratively and co-create, or whether they choose to work independently or get involved in different ways. Different levels of participation are therefore possible when striving to engage the whole of society (informative, consultative, direct involvement, partnerships and empowering) (OECD, 2019). Nevertheless, this approach recognizes the need to further strengthen the coordination of stakeholders in order to improve the effectiveness of policies and interventions (WHO, 2012). Supporting a whole-of-society approach can be done directly, by engaging different stakeholders in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of strategies, programmes or projects, and it can also be done indirectly, by creating an enabling environment for stakeholders to contribute to development on their own (OECD, 2019).

Some authors point to the limitations of deliberative multi-stakeholder governance, and claim that multistakeholderism poses a challenge to democracy, the legitimacy of governance, the protection of common goods and the defence of human rights (McKeon, 2017; Gleckman, 2018). They argue that the rise in this new form of governance is accompanied by a proliferation of formats and instruments not founded on the principles of inclusive democracy and accountability (Evans, cited in Gleckman, 2018).

One problem stems from viewing the various stakeholders, who have differences in authority, legitimacy, interests and power, as equals. Typically, the public sector and civil society organizations work for the common good, while the private sector primarily pursues economic profit. Stakeholder selection and participation is a political process, with implications for the work of any multi-stakeholder initiative (Buxton, 2019). That is why multi-stakeholder mechanisms have been accused of ignoring differences in identities, interests, roles and responsibilities and of replicating power imbalances from the broader society (McKeon, 2017). Even when traditionally excluded groups achieve representation in these structures, legitimate multi-actor deliberation needs appropriate support



Image credit: © James Morgan / WWF-US

⁸<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wssd>

measures, mechanisms and safeguards for those who do not have the time, resources or capacity to participate, to ensure their meaningful engagement (McKeon, 2017). Otherwise, these representatives may be more figureheads than actors with real voice and agency. According to Buxton (2019), the quality of participation and the ability to hold other relevant actors accountable have been considered weak in multi-stakeholder mechanisms. Additionally, the participation of civil society organizations has recently come under scrutiny, criticized for being driven by large “Northern” NGOs that do not represent the concerns of the Global South or marginalized groups (Buxton, 2019). Furthermore, some authors argue that these structures privilege private interests and legitimize increased corporate involvement in global governance (Bäckstrand et al., 2010; Buxton, 2019).

If development is to achieve equal opportunity for all, it must allow for equal agency for all stakeholders, in particular for poor and marginalized people (Rao and Walton (2004), cited in World Bank, 2011). However, truly participatory governance, guaranteeing the protection of human rights against the abuse of power, is an ideal and, in reality, we only find approximations of this ideal (World Bank, 2011). Although the multi-stakeholder model is certainly not perfect, a growing body of evidence shows that multi-stakeholder governance with core democratic values and appropriate mechanisms to ensure the equal representation and engagement of all stakeholders can be successful in addressing complex issues in an inclusive way and can achieve long-term positive results in specific contexts. Deliberation is increasingly recognized as a good option to include marginalized voices, and to provide citizens with voice and agency (World Bank, 2011).

One of the most successful examples comes from Porto Alegre, Brazil, where citizens are involved in allocating part of the public budget (Baiocchi (2003), cited in World Bank, 2011). In China, local spending priorities are determined through deliberative polls (Fishkin (2008), cited in World Bank, 2011). In India, local deliberative forums, anchored in the Constitution, provide platforms for all citizens to participate in local decision-making. These deliberative gatherings provide a chance for poor and disadvantaged people to be part of a public dialogue from which they have historically been excluded. Research by the World Bank’s Development Economics Research Group has found that they have helped to level the playing field by providing a voice to those who usually do not have one (World Bank, 2011).

It is clear that deliberative processes and multi-stakeholder governance are not a panacea, and they do not address all of the democratic and governance challenges. Nevertheless, according to OECD evidence (2020) and existing scholarship, deliberative processes work well for:

- **values-driven dilemmas**, when they encourage active listening, critical thinking and respect between participants and create an environment that enables participants to find common ground;
- **complex problems that require trade-offs**, when they provide participants with time to learn, reflect and deliberate and with access to evidence and expertise from the different stakeholders;
- **long-term issues**, when they are designed in a way that removes short-term interests, incentivizing participants to act for the benefit of the common good.

Definitions

Stakeholder designates any person or group who has a stake, i.e. an interest in an issue, generally because it is affected by or can affect the situation or issue at stake (HLPE, 2018). Key stakeholders governing food systems can include all levels of government, the private sector, international donors, NGOs, marketing and distribution networks, traders’ associations, farmers, community and consumer groups. The term “stakeholder” hides important differences existing in terms of rights, roles, responsibilities, interests,

motivations, power and legitimacy (Nyéléni (2007) and McKeon (2017), both cited in HLPE, 2018). That is why these authors call for the use of the term “actors”. They argue that, from a human rights perspective, a fundamental distinction is to be made between citizens as “rights-holders” and “duty-bearers” that have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to adequate food (Mechlem (2004), UNHCHR (2006) and McKeon (2017), all cited in HLPE, 2018).

Governance can be defined as “the range of political, organizational, and administrative processes through which stakeholders (including citizens and interest groups) articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, take decisions, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences” (Bakker et al. (2008), cited in Smit, 2016). Using a **multi-stakeholder governance lens** is essentially about understanding these stakeholders, their roles, their interests, the relationships between them, and in particular the distribution of power. Power is not evenly distributed, and this affects decision-making. There are particular centres or nodes with concentrations of power where knowledge, capacity and resources are mobilized to manage the course of events. These governance nodes impact food systems through a range of “formal” and “informal” decision-making and regulatory processes (Smit, 2016). In practice, multi-stakeholder governance consists of bringing multiple stakeholders together (including vulnerable and marginalized groups) to participate in dialogue, decision-making and the implementation of responses to jointly perceived problems. The principle behind such a structure is that if enough input is provided by multiple types of actors involved in an issue, the eventual consensual decision

gains more legitimacy, and can be more effectively implemented than a traditional state-based response. Collaboration is needed to minimize trade-offs and overcome polarization and traditional power dynamics (OECD, 2001 cited in UNEP, 2019a).

Agency refers to the capacity of citizens to take on and seek to resolve (not just participate in) traditional public policy problems. Agency is understood as a shared responsibility for social problems, the performance of tasks to address these problems, and deliberation over how to proceed. It entails regular power sharing. Agency is thus manifested by substantive, not symbolic, citizen contributions to a collective decision or public policy (Hendriks and Dzur, 2018). In the context of food systems and food security and nutrition, agency refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about what food they eat, what food they produce and how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems. It also refers to their ability to engage in processes that shape food systems policies and governance. The protection of agency requires socio-political systems that uphold governance structures that enable the achievement of food security and nutrition for all (HLPE, 2020).

1.2. Defining multi-stakeholder mechanisms

Multi-stakeholder mechanisms (MSMs) are participatory decision-making mechanisms created for joint policy-making (and usually also for some degree of policy implementation) between all relevant stakeholders. They have been credited with closing the participation and implementation gap and there is increasing evidence showing that they can minimize trade-offs and overcome polarization and power dynamics via consultation, deliberation and collaboration (OECD, 2020).

MSMs can take different shapes and formats and the stakeholders involved may also differ (who, how many and how they are selected). They can also

use a variety of tools and practices to foster (wider) participation (e.g. consultations, meetings, debates), and operate in a broad range of political economy settings, leading to different results.

The majority of MSMs use a combination of deliberative and participatory democracy approaches.⁹ They are usually composed of a relatively small group of stakeholders, but can engage wider audiences, even the entire citizenry, at particular stages of the policy cycle. Many authors (Elstub (2018), Bouricius (2014) and Schechter and Sullivan (2018), all cited in Carson and Elstub, 2019) support this blended approach. Deliberation requires that participants first become well informed about the topic, then consider different perspectives, in order to finally arrive at a public judgement about what they can agree on.

⁹Deliberative democracy and participatory democracy are two forms of citizen participation. Both terms refer to the direct involvement of citizens in political decision-making, beyond choosing representatives through elections. The main differences concern: (a) the number of participants; (b) the type of participation; and (c) how participants are selected.

This is considered to lead to more informed and rounded public opinion, and better decisions (Carson and Elstob, 2019).

From a practitioner's perspective, one essential point of analysis is to understand the elements of democratic governance embedded in the MSM from a bottom-up perspective (Gleckman, 2018).

1.3. Multi-stakeholder mechanisms – key characteristics and challenges

In practice, MSMs are very diverse and evidence of their effectiveness is mixed. Like other multi-stakeholder endeavours, they vary from short-term consultation processes to multi-year undertakings. Some are highly structured and backed by formal arrangements, while others are much more informal. They can be initiated by governments via a stakeholder consultation process to assess new policy directions, or by NGOs, community groups or the private sector with different interests and purposes (Brouwer et al., 2015).

MSMs are usually governed by defined and agreed processes that help stakeholder engagement to function smoothly. In practice, an important part of building effective partnerships is bringing the different

stakeholders together in workshops, meetings and dialogue. Other activities range from gaining political support to building the capacity of stakeholders, conducting background research, coordinating logistics and supporting communications and media. Facilitation and leadership are paramount for the smooth functioning of MSMs and the achievement of results (Brouwer et al., 2015).

Interlinked notions of legitimacy and structure and process efficiency are at the core of viable MSMs (Vallejo and Hauselmann, 2004). Legitimacy has been defined by Suchmann (1995), cited in Vallejo and Hauselmann (2004), as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions”. It depends, in particular, on the acceptance by the different internal and external stakeholders. Representation, inclusiveness and transparency are key to building the trust necessary for legitimacy. A strong political mandate, like a UN decision taken at heads of state level, can also help to convey legitimacy. Furthermore, it relies on the adequacy of the process to engage stakeholders in a meaningful dialogue in which they feel a sense of ownership and the possibility of gaining benefits. This requires transparency, continuous



Image credit: © James Morgan / WWF-US

communication, openness and respect (Burger and Mayer (2003), cited in Vallejo and Hauselmann, 2004).

Multi-stakeholder collaboration also requires sufficient time and resources. Time to build trust, to withstand internal and external changes, to align different stakeholders and build their capacity, and to organize processes where people can give input and feel connected and committed to a larger discussion and feel confident and empowered to engage in collaborative work (Brouwer, 2019).

Research points toward a set of common characteristics shared by well-functioning multi-stakeholder initiatives. According to Brouwer et al. (2015), such MSMs:

- Have a shared and defined “problem situation” or opportunity;
- Have all key stakeholders engaged in the partnership;
- Work across different sectors and scales;
- Follow an agreed but dynamic process and time frame;
- Involve stakeholders in establishing their expectations;
- Work with power differences and conflicts;
- Foster stakeholder learning;
- Balance bottom-up and top-down approaches;
- Make transformative and institutional change possible.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are also essential, according to Pattberg and Widerberg (2014). Likewise, according to the Collective Impact Forum¹⁰, five attitudes and practices are essential for collaboration and collective impact:

- A common agenda: coming together to collectively define the problem and shape the solution;
- A shared measurement: agreeing to track progress in the same way, which allows for continuous improvement;
- Mutually reinforcing activities: coordinating collective efforts to maximize the end result;
- Continuous communication: building trust and relationships among all participants;
- A strong backbone: having a team dedicated to orchestrating the work of the group.

As alluded to above, the picture is not completely rosy. The role of MSMs in contemporary participatory

governance discourse raises major questions related to the legitimacy, effectiveness and accountability of this kind of mechanism (Bäckstrand et al., 2010 and HLPE, 2018). One key challenge revolves around fostering a working relationship based on trust, mutual respect, open communication and an understanding of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Stakeholders bring their own mandates, interests, competencies and shortcomings to MSMs. Their effective collaboration requires putting in place processes to facilitate stakeholder discussions and negotiations (ODI and FDC, 2003).

Canfield, Anderson and McMichael (2021) argue that multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms introduce a model that has no clear rules for political participation and representation and undermines accountability mechanisms. These authors allege that multi-stakeholder platforms have systematically failed to adequately address power asymmetries in food and agricultural initiatives, which has led many researchers, such as Muller (2011), Cheyns and Riisgaard (2014), McKeon (2017) and Gleckman (2018) (all cited in Canfield et al., 2021) to be sceptical about their ability to do more than promote the interests of powerful parties. The findings of some recent reports, based on research about multi-stakeholders’ initiatives such as the one published in 2020 by MSI Integrity, concur on these limitations of multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms (MSI Integrity, 2020).

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by MSMs, thousands of multi-stakeholder platforms operating worldwide are increasingly showing that positive results in different domains and at different levels can be achieved through multi-stakeholder collaboration, by focusing on the human aspects that help people cooperate, rather than remaining locked in conflict (Brouwer et al., 2015). For instance, an analysis of a four-year period of continuous policy engagement in East Africa, aimed at understanding the role of multi-stakeholder platforms in facilitating an enabling policy environment for climate change adaptation and mitigation, showed how these platforms enhanced a sense of ownership, developed knowledge, created linkages between different governance levels and a wide variety of actors (including policymakers and scientists), and, most significantly, improved policy formulation (Acosta et al., 2018).

As successful examples gain attention, business, government and NGO leaders are increasingly calling for more multi-stakeholder collaboration initiatives. This wave is known as “the collaboration paradigm of the 21st century” (Brouwer et al., 2015).

¹⁰<https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/>

2. MSMs working on sustainable food systems (SFS MSMs)

2.1. Sustainable food systems require collective stakeholder engagement

One of our leading global challenges is providing healthy diets to the world's population while staying within planetary boundaries. The task is immense and even more daunting in the context of fast population growth, urbanization, changing consumption patterns,

climate change and the depletion of natural resources. In the past, interventions in our food systems led to some positive results but also resulted in negative trends, such as an increase in unhealthy diets with low nutritional value, limited access of small-scale producers to viable markets, food loss and waste, food safety hazards, health issues, and an increased ecological footprint and natural resources depletion (FAO, 2018).

The challenges we face in our food systems

Our food systems thrive on nature and the services it provides, but today they are destabilizing our planet and failing to provide all people with healthy and nutritious diets. Food systems are responsible for **80 per cent** of land use change and habitat destruction (Campbell et al., 2017) and for a **50 per cent** decline in freshwater biodiversity (WWF, 2020). Some **33 per cent** of marine fish stocks are being harvested at unsustainable levels, while **60 per cent** are already maximally fished (IPBES, 2019). Moreover, food production accounts for around **30 per cent** of all greenhouse gas emissions (WWF, 2020).

Between **720 and 811 million** people faced hunger in 2020 – 161 million more than in 2019 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2021). This occurs while about **2 billion** people are obese or overweight (WHO, 2021) and close to **40 per cent** of all food produced goes uneaten, either wasted or lost (WWF, 2021). Food systems are the main driver of emerging zoonotic diseases and the risk of new pandemics through humans' continuous pressure on nature's frontier and its wild animals, and through our relationship with livestock.

Around **80 per cent** of the world's extremely poor people and **75 per cent** of moderately poor people live in rural areas where food is produced, and in which indecent work conditions and human rights issues abound among communities that are highly vulnerable to the catastrophic effects of climate change (World Bank, 2016).

Meanwhile, about **55 per cent** of the world's population currently lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to **68 per cent** by 2050. This rapid urbanization trend and a projected global population of nine billion by 2050 pose additional challenges for food systems (FAO, 2019). In particular, urbanization has been accompanied by a transition in dietary patterns, with significant impacts on the sustainability of food systems (FAO, 2017).

Building more efficient, more inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and resilient food systems that deliver healthy and nutritious diets to all is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given the complexity of the challenges faced, the effective and efficient collaboration of all actors involved will be required to formulate and implement a combination of coordinated multi-level actions (FAO, 2018).

Historically, policies to address food issues have had a compartmentalized, decontextualized and individualized approach that fails to address the complexity of food systems. Some authors consider

that this approach also promotes a passive approach to development by treating food system actors as recipients rather than as active players (OECD, FAO and UNCDF, 2016).

There is a growing recognition that complex and multidimensional issues, such as achieving sustainable food systems, require cross-sectoral and holistic approaches, pooling together the resources, knowledge and expertise of different stakeholders (HLPE, 2018). Experts concur that collective stakeholder engagement is indispensable in bringing about the policy changes and investment reforms required to achieve sustainable food systems (McCarthy et al., 2018).

Defining food systems and sustainable food systems (SFS)

A **food system** encompasses the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded. All these activities require inputs, and result in products and/or services, income, access to food and environmental impacts. A food system operates in and is influenced by social, political, cultural, technological, economic and natural environments (HLPE, 2014; UNEP, 2016; Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, 2016; HLPE, 2017). The food system is composed of subsystems (e.g. farming system, waste management system, input supply system) and interacts with other key systems (e.g. energy system, trade system, health system). Therefore, a structural change in the food system might originate from a change in another system (FAO, 2018).

A **sustainable food system (SFS)** is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised (HLPE, 2014). This means that:

- It is profitable throughout (economic sustainability);
- It has broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability);
- It has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability) (FAO, 2018).

A **sustainable food systems approach** “considers food systems in their entirety, taking into account the interconnections and trade-offs among the different elements of food systems, as well as their diverse actors, activities, drivers and outcomes. It seeks to simultaneously optimize societal outcomes across environmental, social (including health), and economic dimensions” (UNEP, 2019a).

2.2. Defining SFS MSMs

Collective efforts are needed to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the SDGs (OECD, 2019). SDG 17 encourages the revitalization of a “global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by the use of multi-stakeholder partnerships” as a means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. It invites states and other stakeholders to “encourage and promote effective public, private and civil society partnerships” that

“mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries” (HLPE, 2018). The Nairobi Outcome Document (GPEDC, 2016) also recognizes the need for inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships and calls for the contributions of all partners to be coordinated and complementary (OECD, 2019).

In this report, the term “**sustainable food systems multi-stakeholder mechanism**” (**SFS MSM**) refers to a formal or informal participatory governance mechanism or collaborative arrangement that brings together different food systems actors (e.g. government, private sector, NGOs, farmers), with different food-related agendas (environment, health, trade, agriculture), from all stages of the value chain (from production to consumption), in an inclusive way to work collaboratively in the promotion of sustainable food systems.

SFS MSMs are generally established to provide recommendations to governments on food systems issues, to develop innovative solutions, and to influence, develop and/or implement food-related policies. This study aims to identify and analyse MSMs that are working to promote sustainable food systems and that are connected to the implementation of an existing holistic food policy or support a national or sub-national level attempt to embed a food systems approach in the food policy-making process.

Food policy is understood as any policy¹¹ that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system. A food policy influences how and what food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased, consumed, stored and disposed of. Traditionally, countries have several “food-related” policies (e.g. agriculture, nutrition, health, environment), instead of a comprehensive holistic one. The sectoral approach prevails, despite the abundant evidence showing its limitations to transition to more sustainable and healthy food systems. Holistic food policies (see definition in the following section) are urgently needed in order to improve coherence across food-related policy areas and achieve sustainable food systems (HLPE, 2018; OECD, 2021).

MSMs working on sustainable food systems take different shapes, names and roles. At sub-national level, food policy council (FPC)¹² is the most commonly used term, but these groups are also known by other names, such as food councils, multi-stakeholder food



Image credit: Edgar Castrejon by Unsplash

forums or platforms, food policy/systems networks, food boards, food coalitions, food partnerships, food movements, food committees, food policy task forces, food alliances and food policy consultation groups. SFS MSMs can also take a range of forms in relation to durability (permanent or ad hoc), legal status (created or not by a governmental decree), and representativeness (level of government and stakeholder participation). They can also operate at different scales (e.g. municipality/county, department/province, multiple departments/provinces, national), and their roles and mandates also vary. These groups usually bring stakeholders together to share perspectives on food systems challenges, to develop innovative solutions, and to influence food-related policy and planning (RUAF and Hivos, 2019). Research on FPCs indicates that some of them (in particular in the USA and Canada) actually focus more attention on programmatic¹³ as opposed to policy work¹⁴ (Schiff, 2008).

¹¹The term “policy” in this research encompasses any type of formal document, such as law, act, executive order, strategy, policy, programme or action plan.

¹²The food policy council represents a model of collaborative governance that emerged during the 1980s in North America and has since expanded to different parts of the world. It seeks to democratize food system governance, favouring the participation of different actors within the food system (e.g. public sector, producer representatives, food activists, small and social entrepreneurs) and developing a holistic vision for meeting challenges at the local or territorial level.

¹³Programmatic work refers to the management and coordination of individual yet interlinked projects aimed at achieving large-scale impacts on a given (global) issue.

¹⁴Policy work usually includes all stages of the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and analysis and evaluation.

3. MSMs and the food systems approach

3.1. Adopting a food systems approach to policy-making

To date, food-related policy-making has followed a sectoral approach, with decision-makers focusing separately on agriculture, health, nutrition, trade and other food-related policies. In addition, interventions have dealt mainly with the production side of the puzzle, while opportunities to promote sustainable food systems by changing consumption patterns are often overlooked. However, food systems challenges go beyond agricultural issues; they are complex, multidimensional and interrelated, and thus require a holistic approach. There is an increasing consensus that countries need to adopt a systems approach to food policies if they are to foster coherence and be successful in tackling emerging problems of food insecurity, climate change, resource use, poverty and health.¹⁵ A food systems approach to policy-making and implementation connects various policy agendas, primarily environmental, agricultural, health, trade and industry agendas (UNEP, 2019a).

Defining a food systems approach to policy-making and implementation

A **food systems approach to policy-making and implementation** can be defined as “the design and/or implementation of integrated interventions planned to optimize societal outcomes (environmental, health, social, and economic), resulting from enhanced cooperation among food systems actors and addressing the drivers and trends of both unsustainable food production and consumption” (UNEP, 2019a).

A **holistic approach to food policy** examines food systems as a whole rather than separate pieces, values outcomes over processes, and adopts a variety of voices rather than individual perspectives (One Planet network SFS Programme, 2020).

¹⁵In 2018, the Ministerial Declaration issued by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (a key UN platform for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs) called on all stakeholders to adopt a food systems approach. Examples of scientific reports that support a call for such an approach include the IPCC's report *Climate Change and Land* (2019); UNEP's sixth *Global Environment Outlook* (2019); the IPES-Food and ETC Group's report *A Long Food Movement: Transforming Food Systems by 2045* (2021); UNEP's report *Food Systems and Natural Resources* (2016); and the OECD's report *Making Better Policies for Food Systems* (2021).

This approach requires broadening the viewpoint to include the integrative nature of food systems rather than a reductionist approach that splits food systems into separate pieces or sectors. It requires integrated and coherent policy-making to align different policy agendas and cross-cutting issues to better meet the needs of food systems actors and support multiple SFS outcomes (environmental, socio-economic and health). Finally, food systems present a novel challenge where systemic optimization is much more important than the more widely employed approaches for sector improvement.

Within the framework of the One Planet network's SFS Programme, the Collaborative Framework for Food Systems Transformation was developed through a collaborative process led by UNEP (UNEP, 2019a). This practical guide for policymakers and stakeholders willing to apply a food systems approach to policy-making and implementation recommends five principles and four actions to build a food systems transformation.

The principles are:

- Focus on long-term outcomes;
- Include food consumption as a driver;
- Facilitate platforms of collaboration among food systems actors;
- Address emerging trends and challenges;

- Promote a common narrative and approach across relevant bodies/ministries.

The actions are:

- Identify an individual or group of food systems champions and build momentum;
- Conduct a holistic food systems assessment;
- Initiate a multi-stakeholder process for dialogue and action;
- Strengthen institutional capacity for food systems governance in the long term.

3.2. Emergence of SFS MSMs

In order to apply a food systems lens to their policies, governments should rethink food systems governance and institutional arrangements and move toward inclusive and action-oriented processes that embrace a variety of voices (from different types of actors and different agendas). In addition to bringing all relevant actors together, various levels of governance need to be involved (from national to sub-national, going beyond administrative borders). Governments also need to increase their strategic capacity for holistically assessing food systems issues and solutions, acknowledging interlinkages between various interventions along the entire food value chain.



Image credits: Lisheng Chang by Unsplash

In this context, MSMs are considered an important element for embedding a food systems approach in policies and facilitate coordinated decisions on food systems. They can help mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to support countries to achieve sustainable food systems and international commitments, such as the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. In other related fields, such as landscape management, hundreds of multi-stakeholder initiatives have been developed in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In these initiatives, public, civil society and private stakeholders collaborate to ensure an inclusive governance of their landscapes (Milder, Hart, Dobie, Minai and Zeleski (2014) and Estrada-Carmona, Hart, DeClerck, Harvey and Milder (2014), both cited in Brouwer et al., 2015).

Thousands of multi-stakeholder initiatives have proliferated in recent years, following the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 and Rio+20 in 2012 (Pattberg and Widerberg (2014), cited in Brouwer et al., 2015). One flagship example of an MSM created to advance food and nutrition security comes from Brazil. In the early 1990s, the proposed National Food Security Policy for Brazil provided the basis for the first experience of a National Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONSEA), which was formed at the time by 10 state ministers and 21 civil society representatives appointed by the president. The council was chaired by a civil society representative. It laid the foundations for the participatory drafting of the flagship Zero Hunger Project, which later became the governmental strategy in Lula's presidency in 2003 (Leão and Maluf, 2012).

A more recent example at global level comes from the Committee on World Food Security.¹⁶ In 2009, after the 2007/2008 world food price crisis, the committee was radically reformed. It became the foremost inclusive platform and was particularly open to the participation of civil society. The committee's key actors are currently its members (130 governments), its participants (representatives of various UN agencies – FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Food Programme, WHO), civil society organizations (Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism), international agricultural research bodies, international and regional financial institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO), representatives of the private sector (Private Sector Mechanism), associations and private philanthropic foundations, and observers (interested organizations

invited to observe). Likewise, in the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN), national multi-sectoral platforms have been established as an integral part of the movement. SUN's objective is to establish or strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms in its member states to align the efforts and programmes of all stakeholders toward the achievement of national nutrition priorities and strategies. SUN's structure and governance¹⁷ emphasize the importance of SUN government focal points in multi-sectoral nutrition responses. The movement collaborates with all duty-bearers and stakeholders, including national and sub-national governments, global partners, networks (civil society, UN, businesses, donors and potentially



Image credits: Artsmela by Shutterstock

¹⁶The Committee on World Food Security is the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international political platform on food security and nutrition with the explicit vision to foster the progressive realization of the right to adequate food for all, see <http://www.fao.org/cfs/en>

¹⁷<https://sunbusinessnetwork.org/network/global-members/>

academia), the Lead Group, the SUN Coordinator, the Executive Committee and the SUN Secretariat.

At country level, there are a few interesting examples of MSMs fostering sustainable food systems, such as the ones studied in this report: the National Food Council (Conseil National de l'Alimentation, CNA) in France, Organic Denmark and Eat Right India. Some recent developments suggest that the multi-stakeholder approach to national food policy formulation and implementation is expanding. For instance, after many years of collective advocacy, the membership of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council was named in February 2021. The council is an independent, multi-stakeholder body with a diversity of voices. It will advise the Minister of Agriculture, Marie-Claude Bibeau, on the implementation of the Food Policy for Canada.¹⁸ Another example is the UK's Advisory Panel¹⁹, appointed to advise on the National Food Strategy,²⁰ an independent review commissioned by the government to set out a vision and a plan for a better food system. The panel is made up of people from across the food system with extensive experience in food issues. However, there is little evidence of the ways in which such mechanisms are formed and complement national governments' efforts to decouple economic

development from environmental degradation, while ensuring food and nutrition security. There is also insufficient knowledge about how, and to what extent, multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanisms at different levels are being aligned and connected. Finally, not enough is known about whether they contribute effectively to complementary visions and commitments to sustainable food systems and policy coherence.

The increased importance of the subject of urban food has been accompanied by a growing emergence of FPCs or similar structures at sub-national level (see Figure 1). These structures are supported by the work of many international initiatives.²¹

However, the emerging importance of MSMs simultaneously raises questions about the extent of their benefits, limitations and performance. They are a means rather than an end to achieving sustainable food systems (HLPE, 2018). Their effectiveness and achievements can be influenced by different factors (e.g. design, engagement, political and financial support). Since the concept of food systems and multi-stakeholder partnerships is quite a recent one, evidence and data about such mechanisms are still vague and fragmented.

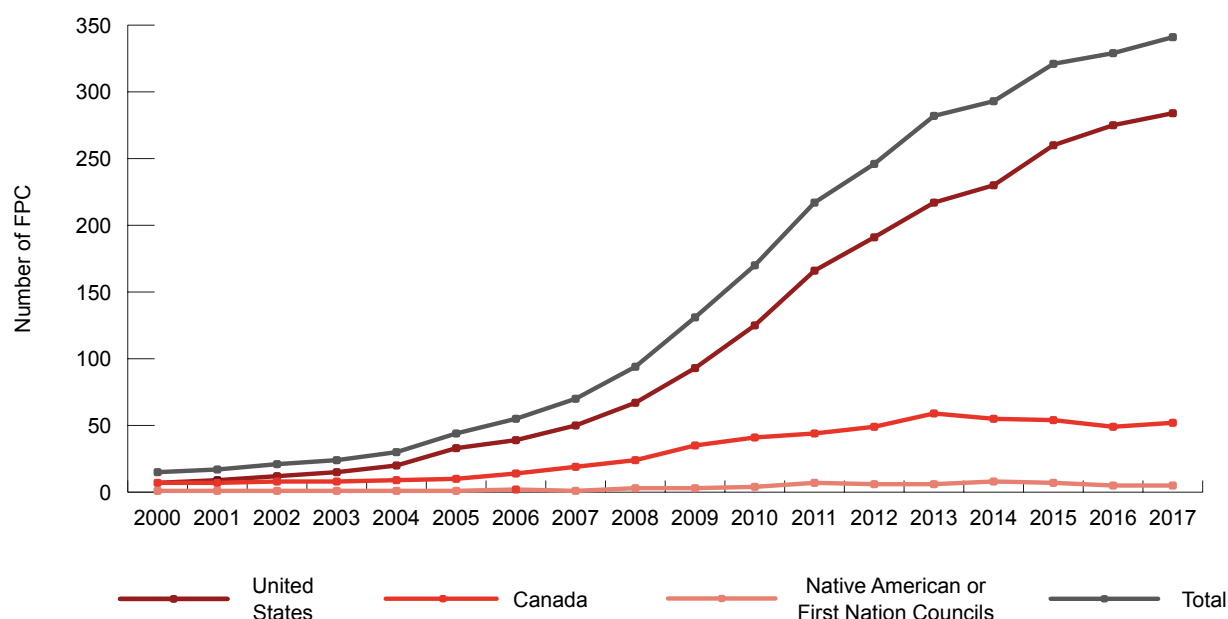


Figure 1. Food policy councils active since 2000

Source: Bassarab, K., Santo, R. and A. Palmer. 2018. Food Policy Council Report. Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.

¹⁸https://multimedia.agr.gc.ca/pack/pdf/fpc_20190614-en.pdf

¹⁹<https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/people-2020/>

²⁰<https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>

²¹Examples include the New Urban Agenda, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), the FAO-RUAF partnership, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and the ICLEI network.



Image credit: Jason Rubens / WWF