

The Zambian Food Change Lab: jointly identifying solutions to Zambia's food systems challenges



Quick Facts



Main objective:

Collective solutions for Zambia's food system and challenges for the future



Place:

Lusaka, Zambia



Lead organisation:

Hivos



Timeframe:

2016-2020

Hivos
people unlimited

Background

Zambia has a vast agricultural potential; however, 35% of its children under the age of 5 are stunted, and 23% of Zambians are overweight. At the same time, a longstanding national agricultural policy favouring maize monocropping has contributed to considerable soil degradation, loss of agro-biodiversity, and made farms more vulnerable to droughts and floods caused by climate change, as well as pests and diseases.

Challenges and Objectives

In Zambia, national policies favour the production of maize, providing subsidies, cheap inputs and fertilisers to farmers. Few resources are invested in producing a broader diversity of other, more nutritious and climate-resilient food crops, like sorghum and millet.

As a consequence, many have poor access to affordable, nutritious and diverse foods, contributing to the country's triple burden of malnutrition.

Maize monocultures have caused the impoverishment of soils, the decline of agro-biodiversity, and have weakened farms' and households' resilience against external shocks like climate change.

Strategy

From 2016-2020, Hivos hosted the Zambian Food Change Lab, a social change process that brought together food system stakeholders from different societal sectors, to jointly identify the country's most pressing food system issues and potential pathways for solutions.

Through regular meetings, the Lab's participants identified and implemented a common agenda, work plan and activities. Although the Lab's working groups were dominated by civil society, farmer and other interest groups, the regular Lab meetings also functioned as a neutral space for government decision makers to discuss policy proposals with the involved stakeholders.

Actions

The Food Change Lab was comprised of **four 'prototyping' groups** of Zambian stakeholders:

- **Crop diversity group** looked at ways to increase crop diversity in Zambia through national agricultural policy change and civil society participation in agricultural and non-nutrition related policy issues.
- **Awareness-raising group** researched consumption patterns in Lusaka to support urban food policy and disseminated audiovisual information material on nutrition for radio and television.
- **Youth inclusion** or the 'Youth for Sustainable Food Zambia' group organized several food festivals and events for young people and local young community leaders, sharing findings and external events and government symposia.
- **Informal food systems**, a coalition of four Zambian civil society organisations looked at how effective the informal sector is at ensuring the availability of healthy food for low-income consumers.



Trade-offs and Synergies

The main focus of the Food Change Lab was to make a case for diversification of the Zambian food system (food production and consumption) to increase both food diversity, public health, soil fertility and agro-biodiversity. However, with markets for other crops than maize being undeveloped, shifting resources from maize to crops like sorghum and millets would potentially risk short term food security and income loss as farmers would have to invest in uncertain markets. A well-managed and government-managed national food diversification program would mitigate these risks.

Results and Impacts

Food Security and health

- A push for food diversification at national and local levels: a discussion paper by Hivos and IIED ([Agriculture, Food Systems, Diets and Nutrition in Zambia](#)), and advocacy work done by the Lab's participants has proven instrumental to inform the Ministry of Agriculture's crop diversification strategy.
- Youth for Sustainable Food: a broad range of youth groups got connected through a national platform that participates and engages in events, activities, podcasts and radio shows. They have been advocating for an enabling policy environment for more diverse and sustainable food production and consumption, local market development and supportive policies for start-ups and SMEs in the food sector.
- The value of local food: a book on the [value of local food](#) was developed to promote the consumption of selected traditional foods of high nutritional value.

Socio-Economic

- Food safety in informal markets: a platform created with the Lusaka City Council plans capacity building activities with food vendors and other informal market actors.
- The shift to an e-voucher system: Introduction of an e-voucher system to allow farmers to get seeds and inputs for crops other than maize. At the moment, the crop diversification strategy, which is a result of the crop diversity group, is almost complete. Hivos and members of the Food Change Lab have been co-creating this strategy together with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Environmental

- Training on reforestation for community leaders through the Kasisi Agriculture Training Institute were

provided and led to reduced deforestation in the area.

Policy changes, policymaking, and governance

- Creation of a sustainable food policy council with the Lusaka City Council: Formation of the Lusaka Food Policy Council (LFPC) which provides an opportunity to institutionalize the experiences gained from the Zambian Food Lab.
- Nutrition was included as a policy priority in the country's seventh National Development Plan (7NDP). In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture abandoned the Farmer Input Support Program (FISP) to move towards the implementation and scaling of the e-voucher system. In 2018, the Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG) task force, coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, incorporated "local and diverse food" as a priority area of focus.



Lessons learned

- Access to markets influence crop diversification, thus efforts and resources need to be devoted to developing markets (both on the supply and demand side) for other crops beyond maize.
- The Lab approach has proven to be an effective social change methodology. Senior government officers got engaged in the process and were motivated to incorporate new food issues on their agendas.
- Diversity of participants is vital, as well as linking locally rooted experiences with national lobby efforts, mixing high-level policy makers with smallholder farmers and informal food vendors.
- Convening power in the multi stakeholder platform needs close attention. It supports the credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of the initiative, convinces stakeholders to engage, and promotes the convergence of input into concrete change processes.
- Discussions on system change must include youth.
- Engaging decision makers in a personal way works best to get their genuine interest and involvement in any topic of interest.