

Local Food Systems to Inform New Policy – Case Studies from Colombia and Vietnam



Quick Facts



Main objective:

Develop a multi-stakeholder process of the local food system to inform new policy and its implementation



Place:

Cali, Colombia and North Vietnam



Lead organisation:

The Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT



Timeframe:
2017-2021



Background

The Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT's offices in Cali, Colombia and Hanoi, Vietnam carried out projects that aimed at implementing a systems approach to address food systems challenges. While the initiatives took place in two entirely different regions of the world - with their unique socio-economic profiles, cultural backgrounds and political dynamics – a common playbook emerged.

Cali is Colombia's third-largest city and has the highest rate of poverty and extreme poverty in Colombia, especially among indigenous and Afro Colombian communities. Around 54% of the country's households experience food insecurity¹. Meanwhile, about 56% of the adult population is overweight or obese (especially women), partly due to the increasing consumption of processed and ultra-processed food. Some of these problems are related to economic dynamics like the expansion of sugar cane production, which has changed the agricultural landscape from diverse subsistence farming to sugar cane monocultures^{2,3}, high labor informality and an increasing migration from other regions bringing consequences in the form of loss of livelihoods, food insecurity and loss of cultural practices⁴.

In Vietnam, food systems have experienced rapid change due to economic liberalization, urbanization, and an improvement of living standards. Agricultural production systems have shifted from predominantly

diverse smallholder systems to larger monocultures. Alongside, the 'meatification' of the Vietnamese diet is generating serious impacts⁵. Efforts to transition to sustainable food systems require context-specific solutions. This 2-in-1 case study will present how participatory, inclusive, science-based decision-making processes are essential to apply a food systems approach.

Challenges and Objectives

A lack of knowledge and interest from decision makers has been a major obstacle in addressing Cali's food issues. The city's scarce measures had tried to focus on malnutrition and hunger. However, by ignoring the range of interrelated dimensions in a food system, efforts were tainted from the outset by a skewed problem framing. Additionally, a lack of adequate data, and implementation through uncoordinated efforts contributed to limited results. This is not unusual. The Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT's Vietnam office based their approach on research that showed that policy makers underestimated long-term structural trends and focused excessively on short-term issues such as food safety (Bene et al. 2020). This led to the wrong policies and investments (Jessica et al., 2019). Additionally, in both locations, consumers' nutrition knowledge was limited, contributing to poor diets.

In Cali, the implications of the vast sugarcane monocultures that fill the region's landscape were not fully considered: vulnerable small-scale farmers experience food insecurity through loss of traditional practices associated to selling and renting of land to the sugarcane industry. Environmental impacts to biodiversity and to traditional agricultural production have also been reported in the region. In Vietnam, smallholder farmers have been progressively facing barriers from more stringent production standards in developed value chains as the sector modernized (Diego Naziri et al. 2010; Dinh, Tung Xuan, 2017).

Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT's objective in both regions was to use evidence to inform a new multi-stakeholder policy-making process that would identify key actions by considering the system as a whole.



One planet
eat with care

Sustainable Food
Systems

Trade-offs and Synergies

In Cali, where a new policy was adopted in 2019, decisions between multiple trade-offs were taken by policymakers. The city council prioritized strengthening nutrition, availability and food access, and dropped several measures such as those focusing on food loss and waste reduction, food prices fluctuation control, among others, due partly to a lack of interest in these issues or a lack of resources to support related activities.

In Vietnam, where the policy development process is in its initial phase, one dilemma centers around animal source foods: while these generally represent good additional income for farmers they entail both local and global environmental impacts. Another trade-off has to do with the repercussions of intensification. While the rapid development of new supply chains creates markets for agricultural products, they can ensue excessive and unsafe use of chemicals as well as difficult smaller farmers to adapt to new standards.

Strategy

In both locations there was a lack of a cohesive long-term vision that accounted for both human and planetary health among stakeholders. Therefore, The Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT's strategy on employing a food system lens – i.e. integrating all elements, actors and outcomes that form our food systems –to promote a policy-making process supporting food systems interventions for healthier diets has been carried out in both places:

In Cali, an inclusive participatory platform was convened, articulated around the discussion of scientific evidence, including research inputs for the development of decision-support tools that allow city-region food system stakeholders to better assess, understand and use information on environmental sustainability and resilience for better decision-making), and which aimed to develop the first holistic food security policy framework for intersectoral action over the next 10 years. In 2009, actors from a range of sectors of the food system joined a process to identify context-specific challenges and priorities. In 2016 the Academic Platform on Food and Nutritional Safety facilitated by The Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT/WLE CGIAR program started supporting the process. This multi-stakeholder platform made of 12 institutions was established to raise awareness, foster synergies, and facilitate a policy dialogue embraced in international frameworks like the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. The platform provided direct input to the Health Department in charge of the policy initiative.

On the other side of the world, in Vietnam, the approach was to develop a diagnosis of the rural-urban transect food systems in North Vietnam (a “profile”) that would provide a snapshot through a set of metrics, and which would be used as a knowledge product that could enable evidence-based discussions. The profile also would offer a baseline for monitoring future changes, and ultimately create a common understanding amongst different stakeholders. Once this was achieved, a policy engagement process kicked off to establish three local multi-stakeholder platforms in three study sites. Through participatory approaches and interdisciplinary collaboration, a wide(r) range of stakeholders' perspectives are being voiced, listened to, and debated for the first time in a policy-making setting. Sharing views and discussing the problem framing set a more solid foundation to design solutions together.



Tools

In Cali, the initiative relied on three tools:

- Food Security Tables established by the Mayor's Office in 2009.
- The Academic platform on food and nutritional safety
- The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact charter and rationale, used as guidance

In Vietnam, the tools used were:

- The food system profile, including three identified metrics: food systems domain; food systems outcomes; and food systems drivers, obtained through different tools (i.e. focus groups, cross sectional surveys, literature review, networking with local authorities).
- The Food systems framework from Raneri et al. 2019.
- The A4NH program adapted from the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (2017).

Results

In Cali, the main result was Cali's food policy approved by the city council in December 2019. It aimed at contributing to food and nutritional security and sovereignty through 6 strategic axis: food supply, food access, adequate and sufficient consumption, food quality and safety, biological use, knowledge management and promotion.

In Vietnam, through the use of the "profile", stakeholders have jointly identified the top three issues as well as their respective solutions to address them in each site. In parallel, the actors that have a direct or indirect role to play in the resolution of the food systems issues were identified.



Lessons Learned

- Develop processes according to the characteristics of the context.
- When formulating agri-food policies, consider establishing a baseline with quantitative, qualitative and spatial indicators to monitor progress.
- Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships with common goals and organize joint communication actions for change.
- Involve the participation of other government partners.
- Keep up lobbying efforts during the final stages of policy approval.
- Connect local and regional activities to international networks and initiatives that can provide tools, technical advice and examples.
- Intermediate cities, as part of the city–region space, are key actors for replication and regional scale-up.

Conclusions

Both of Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT's initiatives applied a food system lens – i.e. integrating all elements, actors and outcomes that form our food systems – by convening an inclusive policy-making process aimed at establishing legal frameworks and

public budgetary plans that support food systems interventions. The critical tools to achieve this have been a multi-stakeholder platform and a compilation of the evidence base, which supported an inclusive, collaborative design of solutions even among conflicting positions from different stakeholders.

The most remarkable common obstacle in both initiatives was the lack of good data for certain of indicators, which diffculted understanding food system trends across rural and urban realities.

Both initiatives stress the importance of a flexible approach to food systems transformation, adapting to local particularities by using a holistic lens, incorporating perspectives from a diversity of food systems actors.

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