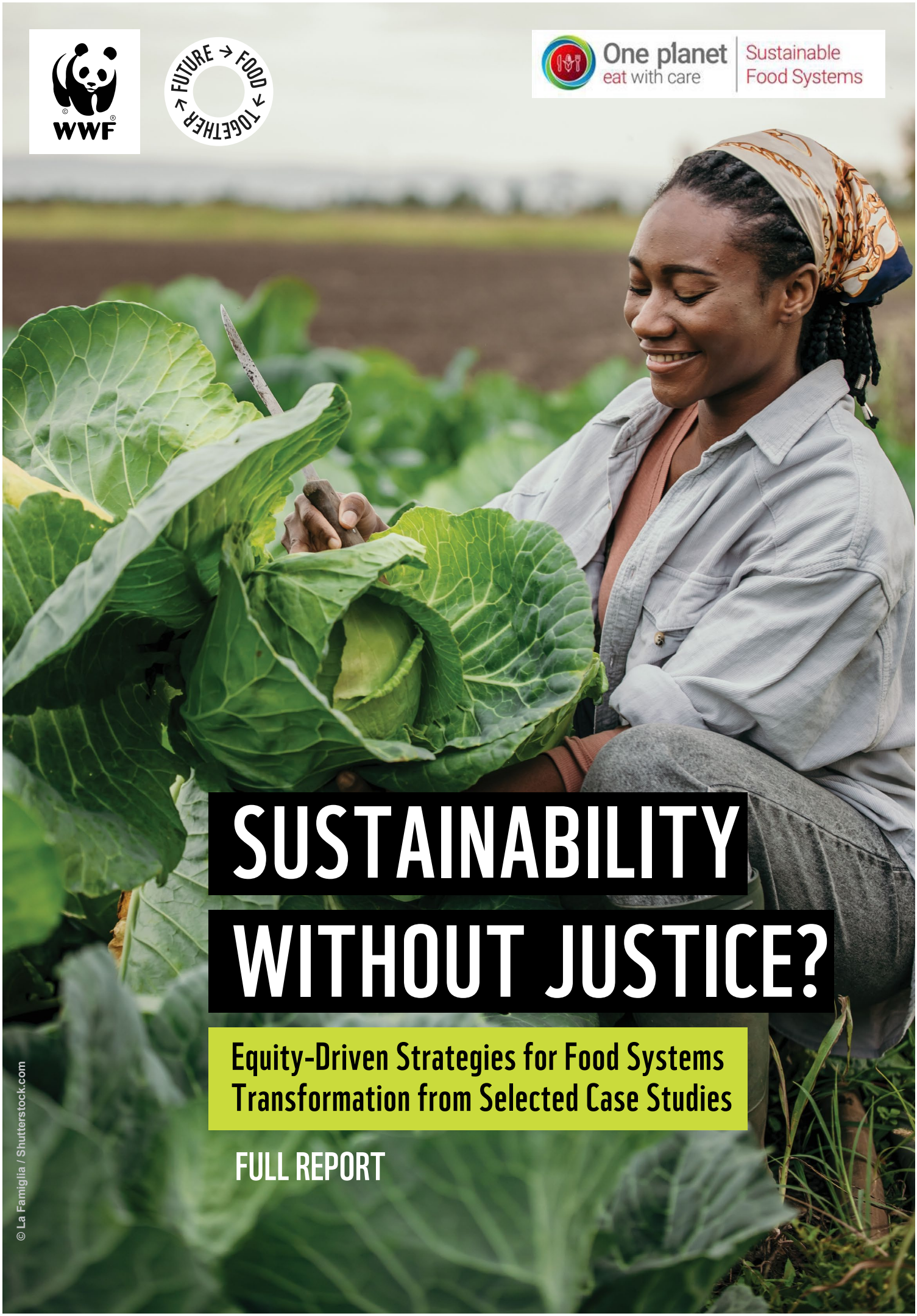

SUSTAINABILITY WITHOUT JUSTICE?

Equity-Driven Strategies for Food Systems Transformation from Selected Case Studies

FULL REPORT

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About this study
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The WWF Future Food Together initiative is a response to the urgent change that is needed in the way we consume and produce food. Future Food Together is engaged in the One Planet Network (OPN providing support for WWF's role as Co-lead of the OPN's Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Programme and as a member of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC) of the OPN's Consumer Information Programme.
This report was conceived by members of the Community of Practice on Food Systems Approach on the Ground (CoP-FSAG) of the OPN's SFS Programme, in consultation with the SFS Programme's Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC). The SFS Programme's CoP-FSAG's goal is to connect different institutions that promote and implement sustainable food systems approaches on the ground. This study was conducted as a contribution to one of the CoP-FSAG's five working areas, which focuses on the promotion and sharing of knowledge, challenges, and solutions in the implementation of systems-based policies and initiatives. More generally, this publication contributes to the OPN's SFS Programme's goal to accelerate the shift toward sustainable food systems using a holistic approach.

The report also contributes to the vision and objectives of the OPN and its five-year Global Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Strategy[1], which encouraged a just transition to sustainability "supported by a renewed international cooperation that leaves no one behind, leads to strengthened scientific and technological advancement, as well as to the promotion of inclusive and equitable sustainable consumption and production in all countries, taking into account national priorities and circumstances." This report responds to the Global SCP Strategy's call to action on a set of key enablers, particularly "Social inclusion: addressing the social costs and inequalities that may result from unsustainable consumption and production patterns."

Finally, this publication contributes to WWF's vision to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.

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About WWF and the WWF Food and Agriculture Practice

WWF is an independent conservation organization, with more than 35 million followers and a global network active through local leadership in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. WWF's mission not only safeguards species but also strengthens the ecosystems that billions of people rely on for food security, clean water, and climate resilience.

The WWF Food and Agriculture Practice works to transform the global food system to support WWF's mission. The Food Practice's vision is a food system which provides nutritious food to all current and future generations while protecting our planet.

About WWF's Future Food Together initiative

WWF's Future Food Together initiative (FFT) is a response to the urgent change that is needed in the way we consume and produce food. FFT promotes a different vision for food systems, one on which humans are in harmony with nature and its food-providing ecosystems. FFT rallies stakeholders around the need for holistic transformative action, implementing collaborative projects that drive Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) approaches at all levels, from local to global.

About the One Planet network and its Sustainable Food Systems Programme

The OPN SFS Programme is a collaborative multi-actor partnership focused on catalyzing urgent transformation towards sustainable food systems, as a critical strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Through a shared vision of inclusive, diverse, resilient, healthy, and sustainable food systems, our partners collaborate on joint on-the-ground activities, research initiatives and advocacy efforts in support of more coherent and holistic policies to address complex food systems challenges.

The SFS Programme is one of six thematic programmes formed to implement the commitments made as part of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP), a global framework agreed by the 193 member states of the United Nations in 2012[2]. The 10YFP is implemented by the One Planet network (OPN).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Costa Rica, the Federal Office for Agriculture of Switzerland, and WWF are the current co-leads of the SFS Programme. The programme is supported by a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC) consisting of 20 members from five different stakeholder clusters, and by over 200 partners from around the globe. More information, and ways to participate, can be found at: https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sustainable-food-systems.

Endnotes

1 https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/global-strategy-sustainable-consumption-and-production

2 The 10YFP was adopted by heads of state and government at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Responding to the call of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, they thereby strengthened their commitment to accelerate the shift toward sustainable consumption and production patterns. Sustainable consumption and production has been included as a stand-alone goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 12), and Target 12.1 calls for the implementation of the 10YFP.

Contents

Executive summary

Introduction

This report provides insights into **practical solutions for tackling the structural inequities in global food systems that are a key barrier to their urgently needed transformation**. To support this objective, it offers a rigorous and multidimensional analysis of the structural drivers behind unequal outcomes in nutrition, health, and sustainability. Drawing on conceptual frameworks and real-world examples, it provides **actionable recommendations and clear pathways to enable transformative, equity-driven change**. The report is structured to support flexible engagement and is accessible to policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and advocates alike.

Although global food production has increased significantly, **current food systems remain misaligned with the principles of equity, public health, and environmental sustainability**. They continue to fuel environmental degradation, public health crises, and environmental and socio-economic disparities. **These outcomes are not inevitable**. By addressing deeply rooted structural imbalances and historic injustices, it is possible to build food systems that are fairer, more resilient, and better aligned with sustainable development goals.

Why this report?

At the heart of food systems interrelated challenges and crises lies a dominant model that prioritises maximising excess profits for shareholders, insufficiently limited corporate concentration and extractive efficiency over the common good: social justice, public health, and ecological resilience. Modern food systems operate within a highly globalised and interconnected landscape. Over time, economic and policy trends, such as trade liberalisation and market consolidation, have shaped the structure of these systems. Today, **a relatively small number of actors play an influential role across various stages of global food systems' domains**, holding concentrated power from production to consumption and governance. Such power imbalance is driving the array of interrelated issues and crises with catastrophic negative impacts to people and planet, including the undermining of human food security and health.

The report leverages, among other, the **Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH) innovative framework as it offers a useful lens to gauge** how business actors' practices can impact equity and sustainability outcomes. For instance, how supply chain management can determine workers and

producers' income and livelihood opportunities, as well as environmental impacts; how product marketing and scientific interference can determine consumers ability to exercise good choices; and how policy interference can determine whose voices are reflected in policies. Understanding these dynamics is increasingly important as countries are in urgent need of advancing sustainable food systems transformation. **When not adequately balanced, some of these practices may contribute to challenges** such as rising burden of disease, food and nutrition insecurity, economic vulnerability, environmental destruction and degradation. These challenges are **particularly acute in contexts where regulatory systems struggle to keep pace with rapid market developments or unexpected events and shocks** – highlighting how outdated governance models and limited metrics of success have proven incapable of addressing the converging crises we now face.

Encouragingly, **many solutions are already emerging**. Across sectors and regions, governments, businesses, and civil society actors are working together to create more resilient and sustainable food systems. **This report responds to the need to highlight valuable equity-driven solutions that can contribute to unlocking food systems transformation.**

What does this report provide?

This report contends that equity must be at the core of food system transformation. Using systems-based analysis and drawing insights from diverse case studies, **the report illustrates how equity-sensitive strategies can serve as powerful levers for change**. By confronting entrenched power dynamics and reimagining food as a public good, these strategies can strengthen accountability, redistribute power, and realign food systems with the public and planetary interest. **An equity-sensitive transformation**, the report argues, **is imperative and within reach, provided it is supported by inclusive policies and bold political leadership.**

Equity dimensions, frameworks and instruments for change

A central contribution of this work is to advance the application of a now widely recognised equity framework comprising three, interrelated **dimensions of equity - distributive**, **procedural**, and **recognitional - as guiding lenses for analysis and action.** By drawing out their implications for action, it takes forward the call for equity-sensitive action, policy and advocacy, as put forth by the 2023 report "Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition" by the Committee for World Food Security's High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (CFS-HLPE). An analysis guided by these dimensions helps identify how and why injustices are perpetuated through unfair access to resources and benefits, exclusionary decision-making processes, the invisibilisation of historical injustices and marginalisation of diverse knowledge systems.

Applying this equity lens across the domains of production, consumption, and governance, the report demonstrates how equity-sensitive strategies can act as powerful entry points to **disrupt systemic lock-ins and identifies key leverage points** to catalyse equitable transformation.

This report also provides a structured overview of the growing number of frameworks and international policy instruments that can be leveraged to support equity-sensitive strategies across food systems. Developed by institutions ranging from international bodies to civil society and research organisations, these frameworks activate different entry points, including gender equity, rights-based governance, commercial

determinants of health, and nutrition justice. Despite differences in scope and approach, these frameworks converge in supporting action across the three key dimensions of equity. International policy instruments also offer powerful pathways for integrating equity into national strategies, linking food systems to wider goals on climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development.

Equity-sensitive strategies on the ground: case study summaries

To ground these insights in lived experience, the report draws on **seven detailed case studies** from the **Philippines**, **Australia**, **Colombia**, the **United States** (U.S.)., **Brazil**, **Japan**, and **Scotland.** It illustrates real-world applications of equity-sensitive interventions. These examples showcase community mobilization, public policy shifts, non-profit engagement, and food economies that promote fairness and sustainability.

1. **Reclaiming food sovereignty by the community, for the community: collective mobilisation seeking to transform the Philippines' food system**

   The experience of MASIPAG - a grassroots network of farmers, scientists, and NGOs – shows that farmer-led approaches rooted in sustainability can contribute to more equitable and resilient food systems. Scaling their impact requires policy frameworks that recognise community innovation, redistribute power, and respond to the realities of communities.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Agroecology delivers multi-dimensional benefits. Diversified, ecological farming practices demonstrably improve climate resilience, food security, nutrition, incomes, and environmental health simultaneously.	**Policy co-optation & dilution.** Transformative approaches risk being stripped of their power through bureaucratic complexity, formalisation, or misalignment with original values. Adoption of isolated elements without addressing underlying power structures or supporting the full package of community strategies risks tokenism and fails to achieve systemic change.
A package of strategies drives systemic change. Combining input sovereignty, agroecology, strengthening of local markets, and inclusive policy and decision making creates synergistic impacts across production, consumption, and governance domains.	**Institutional inertia & conflicts of interest need addressing** National policies often remain biased towards industrial and export models, creating structural resistance. Lack of safeguards (e.g., cooling-off periods between public office and corporate roles) can lead to policies favouring private interests over community needs, undermining grassroots voices.
Procedural equity builds legitimacy and delivers sustainable transformation. Directly involving communities in decision-making across relevant food systems' domains leads to more relevant, trusted, and equitable outcomes.	**Sustainability requires redistributing power.** Lasting equity requires a fundamental redistribution of who controls resources and decision-making power, not just technical solutions or participation mechanisms.

2. Equity-sensitivity in local strategies for sustainable food systems transformation: the case of Victoria, Australia

Victorian local governments are placing equity at the heart of food system strategies by promoting inclusive planning, supporting small-scale producers, and fostering relocalised food economies. These initiatives hold significant promise for driving sustainable transformation even if structural barriers and entrenched systems continue to constrain their full potential.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Localised governance enhances responsiveness. Local governments' proximity enables targeted, community-informed strategies that address specific equity and sustainability issues effectively.	**Profit-centric approaches risk reproducing inequities. Structural limitations remain entrenched.** Relying predominantly on market mechanisms can perpetuate existing inequalities if not accompanied by robust redistributive measures. Without systemic policy backing at higher governance levels, local efforts risk being constrained by entrenched economic structures and power dynamics.
Equity-sensitive planning fosters inclusive and relevant transformation. Embedding equity explicitly in strategies through distributive, procedural, and recognitional approaches can guide more holistic and inclusive reforms. Engaging communities directly in planning through meaningful participatory processes ensures solutions are culturally relevant, trusted, and responsive to actual community needs.	**Procedural engagement without redistributive power is limited. Incomplete operationalisation risks tokenism.** Community participation must translate into tangible influence over resource allocation and policy decisions to ensure meaningful equity outcomes. Without clearly operationalised equity metrics and actions, participatory strategies may become symbolic rather than transformative.
Horizontal scalability enhances broader systemic influence. Successful local models can inspire and guide similar communities facing comparable socioeconomic and geographic contexts.	**Vertical scalability faces systemic inertia.** Without clear strategies for engaging higher-level policy reforms and confronting structural inequities, local successes may fail to catalyse broader systemic transformation.

3. Transforming Colombia's food system through fiscal incentives for healthy food and complementary public policies

Colombia's recent "junk food" policy and fiscal reforms, supported by strong civil society coalitions, show how equity-sensitive tools like taxes on ultra-processed foods (UPFs), food labelling, constitutional reforms and public procurement, can challenge structural disparities in food systems. While these reforms face resistance from powerful industry actors, the Colombian experience demonstrates how coordinated, rights-based action can begin to realign food governance with public health, sustainability, and social justice.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Fiscal and labelling tools can shift consumer behaviours effectively. Taxes on unhealthy products and sugary beverages provide tangible incentives for healthier choices, improving public health and nutrition equity. Clear, science-based labelling systems help inform healthier choices, aligning with public health goals and consumer rights.	**Regulatory capture and industry resistance can hamper transformation.** Early adoption of industry-friendly or misleading labelling can weaken consumer trust and delay meaningful reform. Powerful corporate lobbying, legal challenges, and misleading claims can dilute or obstruct policies, requiring strong political will, advocacy, and evidence-based counterstrategies.
Constitutional reforms anchor food rights. Recognising food as a fundamental right strengthens the legal basis for equitable, sustainable food governance and reinforces government accountability.	**Incomplete implementation risks heightening inequity.** Limited data, territorial disparities, and entrenched market dynamics can hinder effective implementation of transformative reforms. Without comprehensive territorial implementation and monitoring, policies may unevenly benefit marginalised groups, undermining intended outcomes.
Robust civil society coalitions drive systemic change. Coordinated advocacy, combining legal, academic, and community approaches, strengthens accountability and advances equity-sensitive food policies.	**Symbolic reforms without operational follow-through.** Constitutional recognition alone risks remaining symbolic unless actively operationalised through specific laws, dedicated resources, and clear accountability frameworks.

4. Exploring the role of the non-profit sector in advancing systemic equity to reshape the U.S. food system

Disparities continue to undermine access to healthy food and economic opportunities in the U.S. Yet the federal food assistance ("food stamps") program – even if mostly a "band-aid" approach -, when aligned with community-led innovations from non-profits like Fair Food Network, show how equity-sensitive strategies can expand food access and economic inclusion, by doubling access to nutritious food for low-income families and supporting localised food economies. Nonetheless, challenges like underfunding and environmental gaps persist.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Cross-sector partnerships expand systemic transformation. Strategic collaboration across governmental, philanthropic, and community sectors enables comprehensive solutions addressing interlinked inequities in food consumption, production, and governance.	**Trade-offs between reach and local economic impact need addressing.** Expanding incentive programs through large retailers increases access but may reduce benefits for small-scale producers and local economies, requiring careful management to maintain equity objectives.
Nutrition incentives can drive multiple equity outcomes. Initiatives linking food access improvements for low-income communities to economic support for local farmers can effectively address multiple systemic inequities simultaneously.	**Persistent market structures limit systemic equity.** Deeply embedded market norms, including market consolidation and exclusionary finance systems, can undermine equitable transformation if broader structural reforms are not concurrently pursued.
Equity-focused framing builds broad political support. Emphasising both consumer health and economic inclusion can attract diverse stakeholder support, including bipartisan political backing, essential for program sustainability and scaling.	**Limited engagement with environmental justice constrains systemic transformation.** Failing to integrate environmental sustainability with equity objectives may overlook critical opportunities to address interconnected environmental and social inequities, weakening long-term resilience.

5. Transforming Brazil's food system: equity-sensitive public food procurement for sustainability

Brazil's experience shows how equity-sensitive public food procurement can transform food systems, supporting traditional producers, improving access to nutritious, culturally relevant food, and embedding marginalised voices in governance. While barriers remain, initiatives like the Brazilian National School Feeding Program (PNAE) and Catrapovos demonstrate how targeted policies, participatory platforms, and legal innovation can drive inclusion and sustainability within a system still shaped by power and market concentration.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Equity-sensitive public procurement can deliver meaningful food systems' transformation. Strategically directing public procurement toward smallholders and traditional producers advances local market inclusion, food sovereignty, and nutritional equity simultaneously.	**Implementation variability and policy misalignment limit outcomes.** Without addressing bureaucratic hurdles, infrastructure gaps, and inconsistent municipal compliance, procurement policies risk uneven benefits and persistent exclusion. Persistent prioritisation of export-oriented industrial agriculture undermines equity-sensitive public procurement, risking incoherence and weakening long-term environmental and social resilience.
Participatory governance strengthens systemic equity. Inclusive, participatory platforms embed marginalised voices into decision making, fostering equitable governance and ensuring policy relevance to diverse communities.	**Institutional inertia undermines participatory gains.** Bureaucratic complexity and resistance from established actors may impede the implementation of participatory decisions, diluting their intended transformative effects.
Validation of traditional foods and food pathways reinforces recognitional equity. Integrating culturally appropriate, traditional foods into public procurement programmes validates traditional and local knowledge, promoting dietary diversity and cultural inclusion.	**Complex certification creates barriers.** Without simplified regulatory frameworks, stringent sanitary and certification standards disproportionately disadvantage traditional producers, limiting their meaningful participation.

6. Building cooperative food systems from below: collective consumer action for equity and sustainability in Japan

Japan's food system reflects a complex interplay between industrial expansion and community resilience. Despite persistent structural challenges and a policy landscape that often favours market-driven solutions, the experience of the Seikatsu Club shows how equity-driven cooperative initiatives can open space for more inclusive, locally rooted approaches, supporting fairer food economies, healthier diets, and greater public engagement in shaping food futures.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Consumer cooperatives enhance food system resilience. Grassroots cooperatives driven by collective action and democratic governance can build resilient food economies less reliant on corporate-controlled supply chains. Cooperative structures prioritise transparent, inclusive decision-making, empowering consumers and producers alike to shape food practices aligned with community values.	**Structural power imbalances constrain local transformation.** Industrial agriculture, trade liberalisation, and market dominance systematically sideline grassroots initiatives, limiting the viability and eroding gains of cooperative models.
Recognitional equity can be advanced through validation of local knowledge. Cooperatives highlight and integrate local, traditional, and community-based knowledge systems, promoting diverse dietary practices and environmental stewardship.	**Policy incoherence undermines transformative efforts.** Misalignment between local actions and national frameworks, including conflicting priorities and fragmented governance, weakens implementation and stalls systemic progress.
An integrated "packaged" focus on food sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and equity creates resilient communities. Addressing food system equity through fair pricing, consumer engagement, and local economic empowerment generates robust social and environmental resilience. Emphasising locally rooted, circular practices can significantly reduce environmental impacts.	**Consumer norms resist systemic change.** Deeply embedded convenience-oriented consumption patterns and shifting dietary preferences challenge efforts to scale localised, sustainable food alternatives.

7. Land reform as a foundation for food justice and community sovereignty in Scotland

Advancing Scotland's land reform agenda can lay critical groundwork for equitable, sustainable food systems by expanding community access, redistributing ownership, and embedding democratic participation in land use. Yet to unlock its full potential, land and food policy must be more closely aligned. Linking land justice with equitable food system transformation can accelerate climate action, rural regeneration, and public health outcomes.

Transferable Principles	Cautions for Other Contexts
Land reform enables sustainable local food systems. Equitable redistribution and democratised land access empower communities, facilitating agroecological practices and resilient, localised food production.	**Entrenched ownership resists structural change.** Historic power dynamics, consolidated estates, and inheritance laws may strongly resist reforms, limiting practical land redistribution without significant political commitment.
Community ownership advances distributive and procedural equity. Legal provisions supporting community buyouts, land management planning, and public interest criteria embed local voices into governance, decentralising decision-making power.	**Complex bureaucracy limits community uptake.** Without simplified legal frameworks, practical guidance, and administrative support, community groups face difficulties leveraging land reform provisions effectively.
Historical recognition strengthens land justice. Connecting land policy explicitly to human rights frameworks and acknowledging historic injustices provides legitimacy, encouraging broader community engagement and equity-driven reform.	**Policy silos undermine holistic transformation.** Continued separation of land and food policy portfolios limits strategic alignment, weakening overall effectiveness and potential for synergistic impacts.

Final reflections and pathways for policy actions

The report underscores the need to reframe food as a human right and a public good, thus re-balancing its current treatment as a commodity governed by deregulated and financialized markets, which lack human rights-based principles in their design. This does not imply the elimination of markets but rather recognises that, in their current form, they deepen the inequalities that are driving unsustainable outcomes, harming people and planet. **A common message emerges from the report's analysis: transforming food systems sustainably requires redistributing power, resources, opportunities through equity-sensitive approaches**.

Transformative change must be guided by the principles of justice, sustainability, and the public good, replacing the current logics of excess profit extraction and power concentration with equitable benefit-sharing and increased agency of marginalised actors.

Guiding principles are especially important since **food systems change is inherently complex and non-linear, requiring coordinated interventions through coherent "packages" across domains of production, consumption and governance**. Findings show that equity-sensitive strategies are effective when combining grassroot mobilisation with institutional interventions, and rights-based frameworks with market-shaping tools**.**

Equity must be firmly embedded in how food systems are analysed, funded, regulated, monitored, and ultimately transformed, ensuring that marginalised actors have agency, their knowledge is validated, and they benefit meaningfully from transformation. This requires critically defining whose interests are prioritised, whose knowledge systems are validated, who participates meaningfully in decision-making processes, and who benefits from outcomes.

This approach requires **binding commitments at all levels of governance to ensure accountability, transparency, and justice**. Ultimately, **food systems transformation is a political choice**: one that must confront how markets are structured, how power is distributed, and how intersecting inequities are addressed.

Policy Recommendations

Food systems transformation is a political choice that requires bold commitments to dismantle structural inequities and centre public interest at every stage of the transition. The report outlines nine equity-sensitive policy recommendations to guide governments, civil society, and communities. These are grouped into three categories: **Foundational enablers and structural levers (1–5),** Establish institutional and legal conditions for redistributing power and aligning policies with equity goals; **Sectoral interventions (6–8),** Address specific food system domains and community livelihoods to make equity operational; **Inclusive monitoring (9)** ensures transparency, accountability, and responsiveness through equity-focused evaluation. The following **Table 1** maps the recommendations against the three equity dimensions explored in the report.

TABLE 1: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND EQUITY RELEVANCE

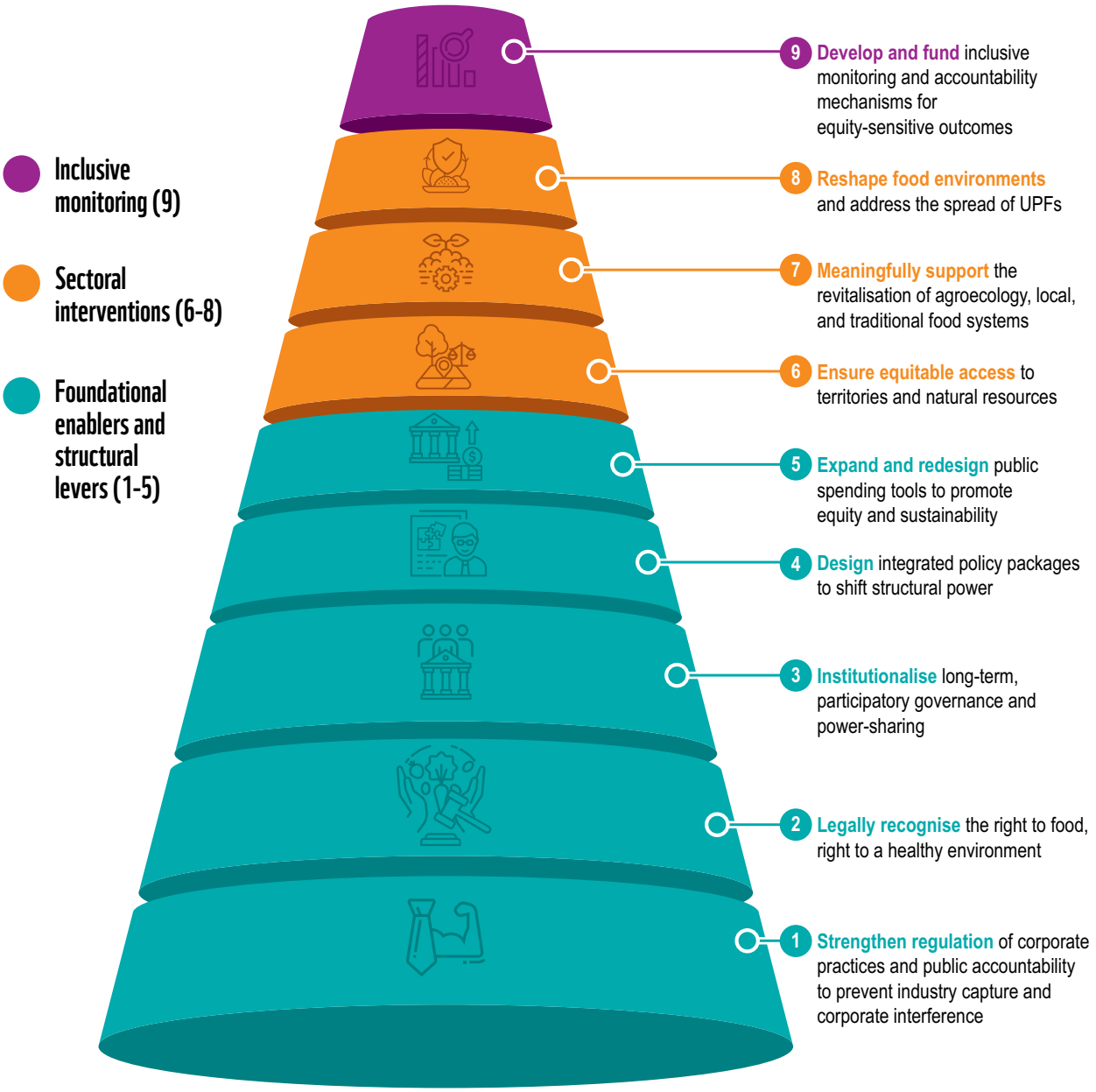
Categories	Recommendation	Description	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Foundational enablers and structural levers	**1 - Strengthen regulation of corporate practices and public accountability to prevent industry capture and corporate interference**	Curbing corporate influence and ensuring transparent, rights-based governance are essential to reclaim food systems in the public interest.	High — Helps correct imbalances in resource and harm distribution shaped by corporate power.	High — Public accountability requires participatory and transparent processes.	High — Protects non-commercial food systems, traditional knowledge, and collective models from marginalisation and appropriation.
	2 - Legally recognise the right to food, right to a healthy environment	Legal recognition of food and healthy environments as human rights is essential to shift power, protect community-defined food systems, and institutionalise accountability.	High — Legal rights frameworks help secure fair distribution of food, health, and environmental goods.	High — Rights-based governance embeds inclusive, accountable processes.	High — Recognitional equity affirms the legitimacy of local food systems, traditional knowledge, and non-market logics, challenging dominant narratives around food production and governance.
	3 - Institutionalise long-term, participatory governance and power-sharing	Sustainable transformation depends on embedding community leadership and shared decision-making into the architecture of food system governance – both in public and private spheres.	Medium — Embedding community voice supports more equitable resource distribution.	High — Institutionalises inclusive and shared decision-making.	High — Affirms diverse knowledge systems, lived experiences, and culturally rooted foodways to advance recognitional equity.
	4 - Design integrated policy packages to shift structural power	Transformative change requires coordinated strategies that align legal, fiscal, and regulatory tools across sectors and domains to tackle root causes of food system inequities.	Medium — Directs public resources toward historically excluded producers and communities.	High — Fosters alliances and institutions that enable inclusive policy development, litigation, and accountability.	Medium — Embeds plural food cultures, traditional knowledge, and marginalised voices in decision-making and public narratives.
	5 - Expand and redesign public spending tools to promote equity and sustainability	Public procurement and subsidies must be reoriented to support diverse producers, reflect true costs and values, and enable equitable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food.	High — Redirecting subsidies and procurement supports diverse producers and equitable food access to culturally relevant food.	High — Enables co-design, participation in oversight, and local governance by beneficiaries and producers.	Medium — Has strong potential to uplift marginalised producers, and validate traditional foodways if tailored accordingly.

Sectoral interventions	**6 - Ensure equitable access to territories and natural resources**	Secure and just access to land, water, and ecosystems is foundational for sustainable food systems and must be addressed through inclusive, pluralistic governance frameworks.	High — Determines who has access to valuable natural resources.	Medium — If tailored accordingly can foster inclusive governance of natural resources.	High — Explicitly redresses legacies of dispossession and supports culturally grounded land/resource stewardship.
	7 – Meaningfully support the revitalisation of agroecology, local, and traditional food systems	Supporting agroecological and traditional systems is critical for cultural continuity, climate resilience, and equitable livelihoods—beyond technocratic or market-based green transitions.	High — Supports fairer livelihoods and food access rooted in community-defined systems.	Medium — Can contribute to advancing community-lead decision-making on research, certification, standards, and food system priorities.	High — Centres and validates traditional knowledge, practices, and cultural identities.
	8 - Reshape food environments and address the spread of UPFs	Transforming food environments is key to advancing health and cultural equity by reducing the dominance of UPFs and restoring community control.	High — Improves availability, affordability, and desirability toward nutritious, sustainable, and culturally appropriate foods, and can reduce exposure to harms, especially for disadvantaged groups.	Medium — Can advance inclusive processes if affected communities lead decisions shaping local food environments, to avoid technocratic, top-down interventions.	High — Can directly address food apartheid, resource and protect local foodways and culinary identities and restore community agency over food environments.
Inclusive monitoring	**9 - Develop and fund inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanisms for equity-sensitive outcomes**	Robust, community-led monitoring systems are vital to track progress, uphold rights, and ensure that equity commitments translate into real outcomes.	High — Advances three dimensions of equity when monitoring is community-led, legally anchored, and tied to accountability; otherwise, risks becoming symbolic and failing to challenge structural disparities.		

These recommendations are designed to **guide national and local governments, civil society organisations and community actors** in advancing equitable food systems transformation across diverse contexts. They provide a **clear, actionable blueprint to translate the report's insights into meaningful, transformative action**.

Figure X displays the Recommendations in a flowchart, from foundational enablers to sectoral interventions to monitoring. While solutions are always dependent on the political economy of a given context, one set of policies can help create the conditions for the next. **Section 5** includes a comprehensive list of stakeholder-specific actions under each of the nine recommendations.

FIGURE 1: NINE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ACROSS THREE CATEGORIES



Summary of Enhancements to CFS Policy Recommendations

Most of this report's policy recommendations align broadly with the CFS Recommendations to address inequalities in food security and nutrition. However, this study's recommendations provide **a set of suggested enhancements that may improve the impact of the CFS Recommendations. Table 2** provides a summary display (see **section 5** for the more detailed analysis).

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF ENHANCEMENTS TO CFS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY-SENSITIVE FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Recommendation Category	Recommendation Number	Study's Recommendation Title	Identified Gaps in CFS Policy Recommendations	Proposed Enhancements / Concrete Actions to Overcome Gaps
FOUNDATIONAL ENABLERS & STRUCTURAL LEVERS	**1**	**Strengthen regulation of corporate practices and public accountability**	Fails to acknowledge the role of **commercial determinants of health** and corporate political activity. Lacks **concrete safeguards** to effectively tackle conflicts of interest (beyond general calls for transparency).	• Enact **legally binding bans** on corporate interference in public policy. • Mandate **full transparency in lobbying** (public registries, disclosures). • **Ban corporate sponsorship** of public health/food campaigns and research. • Establish **independent food ombuds institutions** with enforcement powers.
	2	**Legally recognise the right to food and the right to a healthy environment**	Falls short in challenging food's status as a **market commodity**, a key barrier to materializing the right to food. Lacks **concrete accountability measures** for violations.	• **Ban speculative trading** of staple foods and financialization of essential land/water. • **Delist food from commodity markets** and ban derivatives trading. • Establish **ombudsperson institutions** with authority to investigate violations and mandate compliance.
	3	**Institutionalise long-term, participatory food governance and power-sharing**	Provides general calls for participation but lacks **concrete actions and guidance** to materialize meaningful inclusiveness.	• Create **food policy councils** (or similar) with **binding power-sharing mechanisms**. • **Mandate representation quotas** (e.g., 50% grassroots) in governance bodies. • **Allocate financial resources** to enable meaningful civil society participation.
	4	**Design integrated policy packages to shift structural power**	Calls for policy coherence but lacks **specific measures** to embed an equity lens into coherent policy packages.	• **Mandate equity impact assessments** for all policies affecting food systems. • Set **time-bound targets for inequality reduction** to guide and evaluate policy coherence.
	5	**Expand and redesign public spending tools**	Emphasizes inclusive procurement but lacks **actionable measures and binding targets**.	• Establish **specific binding quotas** for sourcing from smallholders and agroecological producers (e.g., 30% within 6 years). • **Invest in publicly owned food hubs** or logistics platforms to break distributor dominance. • **Institutionalize true cost accounting** to align spending with long-term public interest.
SECTORAL INTERVENTIONS	**6**	**Ensure equitable access to territories and natural resources**	Only calls to *prevent further* land concentration, implying current distribution is acceptable. Lacks **concrete redistributive actions** and does not address drivers like **speculation and financialization**.	• Enact **redistributive policies** for land and natural resources where concentration is high. • Establish **participatory land trusts** or community trust frameworks. • **Ban foreign or speculative acquisition** of essential food-producing territories.
	7	**Meaningfully support the revitalisation of agroecology...**	Pinpoints agroecology as key but remains general, lacking **specific, actionable support mechanisms**.	• **Set mandates to increase public/private investment** in agroecology. • **Establish targets** to train farmers in agroecological practices. • **Legally protect seed sovereignty** and revisit intellectual property laws. • **Create national agroecology funds** with grants (not just loans) for marginalized groups.
	8	**Reshape food environments and address the spread of UPFs**	Aligns closely but can be strengthened with **more proven, impactful regulatory measures**.	• **Apply special taxes ("health taxes")** on unhealthy UPFs. • **Ban child-targeted marketing** of harmful products. • **Mandate warning labels** on UPFs, free from industry interference.
INCLUSIVE MONITORING	**9**	**Develop inclusive monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms**	While frequently mentioned, recommendations lack focus on the **procedural and recognitional equity** of the monitoring systems themselves.	• Create **accountability mechanisms and institutions** that allow for **participation by civil society and communities** in monitoring and oversight. • **Fund community-led evaluation** and research programs. • **Tie public budgets** to performance on equity-sensitive targets.

How to navigate this report

This report is structured modularly. It is designed explicitly to accommodate various audiences and their distinct informational needs, allowing readers to navigate its contents flexibly based on their individual profiles, professional backgrounds, or specific interests.

The report is organised into the following core modules:

1. **Introduction:** This section sets the foundation by highlighting the systemic dysfunctions of current food systems' design and framing the urgency for equity-driven transformation.

2. **From crises to opportunities:** This part provides an overview of the key challenges that the current food systems are facing and introduces key drivers like power asymmetries and profit driven ideologies. It identifies the opportunity to address these drivers lies in systemic and equity-driven approaches to food systems reform.

3. **Mainstreaming equity in food systems transformation:** This section outlines the report's conceptual core by detailing the three dimensions of equity that shape its analytical framework: distributive, procedural, and recognitional. It also offers a selection of frameworks and guiding tools to translate these equity dimensions into actionable strategies across different policy and programmatic contexts.

4. **Case Studies:** Here, readers will find detailed analyses of seven real-world examples that illustrate how equity-sensitive sustainable food systems transformation can be realised in practice. Rather than seeking specific initiatives that capture all dimensions of equity, the report intentionally examines a diverse set of case studies, each contributing partial but valuable insights across equity dimensions. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the structural, political, and community-led elements needed to institutionalise equity in food systems. The section delves into experiences from different geographies and levels, with the contributions of varied stakeholders, and looks at both successes and ongoing challenges in realising transformative change.

5. **Conclusions and policy recommendations:** The report concludes with a synthesis of insights derived from the conceptual foundations and case studies. It outlines nine concrete policy recommendations aimed at institutionalising equity within food systems transformations, spanning legal reform, governance, public finance, agroecology, corporate accountability, and land access.

The following **Table 3** serves as a **navigational aid** for readers, outlining how different stakeholder groups can engage with the report based on their specific interests, professional roles, and strategic priorities. Whether readers are policymakers seeking actionable reforms, advocates aiming to address structural injustices, professionals looking for practical tools and models, civil society organizations advancing grassroots efforts, or commercial actors aligning with sustainability and equity goals, this guide is designed to help them quickly identify the most pertinent insights and effectively navigate the report's modular content.

TABLE 3. NAVIGATIONAL AID FOR READERS

Report Section	Policymakers	Equity experts	Food systems professionals	Civil society organizations	Commercial actors
1. Introduction	Understand why this report is needed.				
2. From crises to opportunities	Recognise how concentrated power, inequitable governance, and commodification limit policy impact in food systems.	Gain a foundational understanding of challenges, power and disparities in global food systems.	Contextualise professional practice within broader power asymmetries and systemic injustice.	Ground advocacy in systemic analysis of the barriers communities and policymakers face.	Gain insight into how business practices perpetuate or can help dismantle structural inequities.
3. Mainstreaming equity in food systems transformation	Gain a foundational understanding of equity dimensions and frameworks to inform fair, inclusive, and context-sensitive policymaking.	Learn how the dimensions of equity and actionable frameworks are operationalised across domains to design just food systems.	Integrate equity principles and frameworks into operations, assessments, and engagement strategies.	Get familiar with equity-based frameworks to advocate for community needs and support inclusive, local actions across food system domains.	Align business governance, models and strategies with frameworks addressing justice, inclusivity, and sustainability.
4. Case Studies	Learn from success and challenges in policy implementation across diverse settings to replicate or adapt.	Examine real-world models of equity-based food systems reform to identify practical insights, challenges, and opportunities for application or collaboration.		Discover successful grassroots initiatives and strategies for community empowerment.	Identify avenues for leading equitable business practices for food systems transformation.
5. Policy Recommendations	Gain insights on pathways for innovative policy action to drive urgently needed systemic reform and guide legislative change.	Align practice with concrete, strategic and equity-centred directions.		Leverage actionable recommendations to foster inclusive governance, equity-sensitive policy reform and community mobilisation.	Understand how to align business practices and partner with policymakers and communities to advance shared sustainability and equity goals.

01

INTRODUCTION

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Food systems are complex, dynamic, non-linear, and interconnected networks that span the entire spectrum of food production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal, along with the socio-economic, institutional and environmental factors that both drive and result from them[3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]. The significance of food systems in policy and research has surged in recent years, driven by growing concerns over their dysfunctionality. It has become apparent that, **while food systems have successfully increased food production to theoretically nourish the world's population, they are both drivers of and impacted by significant issues and crises**. Critically, food systems are struggling to ensure the fulfilment of the planetary right to health and the recently recognised human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment[10]. They are also major drivers of environmental degradation, contributing to biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and of the most significant public health challenges[11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16].

More than dysfunctional, the current shape of our globalised food systems can be described as a systemic failure: a design built on profound historical inequities, and that continues to reinforce weak governance structures. This design perpetuates socio-economic and environmental disparities, failing to equitably address the needs of the planet and its populations. This assertion of 'failure' echoes through numerous studies and reports[17, 18]. While there is growing consensus among scientists, civil society, and policymakers that our food systems are not delivering what is expected nor what is needed[19], agreement is harder to reach on how to define and, especially, on how to achieve sustainable food systems capable of meeting this challenge[20]. Entrenched conceptual frameworks play a key role in this debate. **Dominant discourses are rooted in extractive, speculative, and "shareholder primacy" logics. These prioritize maximising excess profits for a small minority, favour corporate efficiency allowing excessive market concentration, and conceived solutions mostly as technological fixes – all while downplaying social and environmental externalities.**

These logics are deeply embedded in policy, media and academic spaces, and limit consideration of transformative approaches that could more effectively deliver public goods. As a result, the potential for truly transformative change remains limited unless these ideological underpinnings are made explicit and open to critical scrutiny[21]. Additionally, competing priorities in agricultural, economic, fiscal, and social policy further complicate the path forward[22].

Yet, this is not an irreversible trajectory. **A profound paradigm shift is needed to address food systems' challenges, and it can come within reach through bold policy action, informed by science and guided by urgent justice**, that can turn widespread inertia into momentum. Incremental action is insufficient, and thus systemic transformation is urgently imperative[23, 24, 25]. Inaction would be a moral failure and a grim prospect for both humanity and the planet; striving for change, instead, is a necessity and a powerful affirmation of responsibility to forge a more just, sustainable, and resilient future. While a one-size-fits-all strategy to achieve sustainable transformation of food systems remains elusive, the necessity for adaptable, context-specific approaches to sustainability is evident - and equity sensitivity should remain a core component of this vision, because achieving food security and sustainable food systems is improbable without addressing inequality and injustice[26, 27, 28].

1.1 Why this report? The need for an equity-driven food systems transformation

It is evident that our global food systems stand at a critical juncture. The challenges that our food systems face today are often directly linked to deep-seated inequities that have long shaped how our food is produced, accessed, and governed[29]. **These inequities, whether they manifest as unequal access to resources, social exclusion or power imbalances in shaping systems and their outcomes, are not peripheral issues – rather, they are core drivers of the systemic failure we witness.** Addressing them is crucial to unlocking currently entrenched dysfunctional systems and redirecting them toward a sustainable and just path[30]. **Equity-sensitive strategies that prioritise people, the planet, and prosperity must be at the heart of this transformation.**

A systems-based approach to food systems transformation inherently requires strategies that confront and resolve these disparities[31]. **Historical precedents show that systemic and rapid transformations often arise when societies confront the limits and contradictions of market-centred approaches, especially during periods of crisis. Some of these moments have catalysed a reimagining of essential services,** - such as health and education - as public goods, requiring equity-based **robust public investment and democratic governance.** Moments of crises have also seen market force's capacity for profit extraction significantly affected, **manifesting the critical role of public intervention in delivering basic human needs.** However, in recent decades, a resurgence of market-driven reforms has prioritised short-term efficiency, profit maximization and market concentration over equity and access to essential services, deepening patterns of exclusion. Still, these patterns point to a possibility: **in periods of systemic stress, while structural failures are exposed, space opens up to rethink what is essential and how to sustain it**. **Today's converging crises offer such a moment where windows of opportunity for transformative change can open.** Food systems are a key space where the provision of essential goods can be rethought as foundations of a more just and sustainable future.

Existing framings of food systems transformation are influenced by siloed thinking: incorporating insights from the social sciences is crucial for achieving a just and sustainable transformation[32]. **This report contributes to this urgent agenda by centring concrete, equity-sensitive strategies that challenge dominant power structures and drive meaningful change.** It takes a closer look at real-world applications of efforts to transform food systems, highlighting case studies that illustrate both challenges and successes in redistributing power, enhancing accountability, and prioritising ecological and social well-being over profit-driven imperatives.

Drawing from the case studies, the report demonstrates the viability and impact of equity-focused approaches, providing practical insights into overcoming systemic lock-ins. It presents actionable policy recommendations aimed at hastening the transition toward resilient food systems capable of meeting the intertwined socio-economic, health, and environmental challenges facing our global community.

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02

FROM CRISES TO OPPORTUNITIES


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The challenges of our global food systems are multiple and interconnected, and span food availability and accessibility, ecological decline, and the rise of diet-related health burdens - all of which are deeply intertwined and underscore the urgent need for systemic reform.

Meaningful reform is thwarted by the tendency to handle food system issues in isolation, siloing agricultural, trade, geopolitical, environmental, health and social dimensions. Systemic vulnerabilities are perpetuated by systems that continue to operate under current market rules and without challenging the self-regulation of food systems' externalities[33]. In this chapter, we offer a glimpse of the overlapping challenges and crises within food systems. We then take a step further in our analysis and set out to define inequality and inequity in the context of food systems, exploring how current patterns of power and market logics weight into this picture. Ultimately, building on this analysis, we outline what can be done to successfully address these urgent crises.

2.1 Dysfunctional food systems confronting multiple challenges

The need to ensure equitable food access and availability across populations highlights how food system outputs are shaped by multiple overlapping challenges[34].
The globalised nature of food production has concentrated output in a handful of exporting nations, contributing to the dependency of many countries - especially in Africa, Central America, and the Middle East - on imports, leaving them highly exposed to trade disruptions and price spikes[35]. **Geopolitical tensions and conflict further complicate this picture**, driving disruptions in supply chains, trade and global markets, and intensifying competition over critical resources such as water and land[36]. Global surges in food prices such as those observed between 2008 and 2012, and following the Ukraine war, have strained food availability and accessibility for communities worldwide. Price spikes – ultimately determined by powerful market players[37, 38] - have also swayed political dynamics, prompting influential agricultural lobbies to push back against environmental regulations that sought to protect the integrity of natural resources, heavily depleted by unsustainable practices[39].

At the same time, in their attempt to feed the world, **globalised food systems** - reliant on high-input production methods and extended distribution chains - **have become one of the primary drivers pushing human activity beyond planetary boundaries.** These environmental harms pose significant threats to humans, ecosystems and the long-term viability of food systems[40]. While natural resources like land and water are essential for growing food, activities across food systems' domains deeply affect the quality and availability of these same resources. This creates self-reinforcing feedback loops: food systems both shape and are shaped by environmental conditions. As a result, they are highly vulnerable to the accelerating triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss[41, 42, 43, 44].

Adding to this fragile picture is the staggering level of food waste. **Roughly one-third of food intended for human consumption, equivalent to 1.05 billion tonnes annually, goes to waste**[45, 46, 47]. This represents a massive loss of natural and financial resources for households, businesses, and institutions. Daily, over 1 billion meals of edible food are discarded globally, enough to provide one meal to every person experiencing hunger[48]. Beyond moral and economic concerns, food waste is a potent environmental threat, as it generates large quantities of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas[49].

BOX 1 – FOOD SYSTEMS' AND THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

- **Pollution**, arising from dominant food system practices such as intensive agriculture, is a critical driver of environmental harm, impacting air, water and soil. Focusing on the latter, for example, soil microbiomes play a vital role in maintaining ecosystem functions by immobilising heavy metals, degrading organic pollutants, and preserving soil structure. However, pollution significantly disrupts these microbial communities, compromising their ability to sustain soil fertility and increasing environmental risks[50]. Microplastics have similar effects on soil microorganisms, affecting nutrient cycling and carbon dynamics. These disruptions weaken soil resilience, diminishing its capacity to support agricultural productivity[51]. This cycle amplifies environmental damage, undermining the ecosystems that sustain life, and increasing the risk of global hunger[52].
- **Climate change** is significantly driven by food systems, with production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste collectively responsible for roughly one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions[53]. At the same time, these systems are inherently and highly vulnerable to the accelerating climate crisis, environmental shocks and stresses.
- **Biodiversity loss** is largely driven by food systems, which are the leading cause of ecosystem degradation and account for 70% of global freshwater use. This creates a harmful feedback loop that undermines the long-term resilience and sustainability of food systems within current dominant practices. Biodiversity erosion stems both from the direct encroachment into and degradation of biodiverse ecosystems, through practices such as deforestation, land conversion, and habitat fragmentation, and from the increasing specialization of industrial food systems, which rely on a narrowing range of crop and livestock species, thereby diminishing agrobiodiversity[54, 55].

On the human health front, while food systems globally generate enough food for 7 billion people, about half of the global population continue to suffer from malnutrition, with 2 billion lacking essential vitamins and minerals and over 800 million enduring chronic hunger[56, 57, 58, 59]. Undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies disproportionately affect the wellbeing of children and women, particularly in developing countries[60]. At the same time, the global rise in overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) - including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and certain cancers - is strongly linked to the evolution of dietary patterns shaped by globalised, profit-driven food systems. These systems promote the widespread availability, affordability, and aggressive marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor ultra-processed foods (UPFs), especially among low-income and marginalised populations[61]. Undernutrition and obesity often coexist within the same populations, especially in low- and middle-income countries; this dynamic, often referred to as a 'double burden' of malnutrition[62]. The interplay of these conditions underscores the intricate ways in which food systems dynamics drive health outcomes, demanding nuanced and context-specific approaches to improve food systems-related public health outcomes. Ensuring that our food systems tackle global malnutrition requires extending the focus beyond just meeting food production targets to reshaping the system's patterns and dynamics, ensuring equitable access to nutritious diets without crossing planetary boundaries.

A complete overview of the stressors faced in the different dimensions of food systems globally is beyond the scope of this report and has been covered in other reliable sources[63, 64, 65, 66, 67]. To further illustrate the interconnected, self-reinforcing, and systemic challenges facing today's flawed food systems, two additional critical examples are antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and agrochemical pollution - both of which highlight the complex, intersectoral dynamics at play. The widespread use of antibiotics in intensive agriculture and animal farming contributes significantly to the rise of antibiotic-resistant pathogens, presenting severe risks to human, animal, and environmental health[68, 69]. Similarly, agrochemicals and pesticides use - rapidly increasing, especially in low and lower-middle-income countries[70] - pose escalating health and environmental risks. These substances contaminate soil, water sources, and food supplies, with mounting evidence linking them to adverse ecological impacts and public health outcomes[71, 72]. **Addressing these issues underscore the critical importance of adopting systemic and intersectoral approaches**, of which 'One Health' is a relevant example. It recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and ecosystem health, and highlights for coordinated actions across agriculture, healthcare, and environmental management sectors to effectively mitigate shared challenges[73].

These converging crises are inseparable from the socio-economic structures that underpin global food systems. They reveal the structural fragility of current food systems and the need to move beyond fragmented or technical solutions. Addressing them is possible: it requires systemic approaches that grapple with the underlying political economy of food systems - especially the concentration of power, the commodification of food, and the disparities they perpetuate. **The next section explores how these dynamics manifest as both barriers and potential leverage points in the pursuit of equitable, sustainable transformation.**

2.2. Inequities and power concentration: from barriers to transformation to leverage points for change

Globally, food systems are increasingly vulnerable, shaped by systemic

dysfunctions and entrenched disparities that are not accidental, but rooted in concentrated economic and political power. This concentration has been enabled by regulatory environments and policy choices – themselves shaped by a complex interplay of institutional, historical, economic, and political dynamics rather than by deliberate design alone[74, 75]. Collectively, these dynamics, favour market consolidation and limit public oversight. They manifest through significant corporate influence over supply chains, input markets, direct marketing and distribution to consumers, and disproportionate lobbying power in policy processes[76, 77].

Current approaches to transforming food systems risk falling short if they overlook the role of power concentration in shaping those disparities[78], that are intimately tied to unsustainable processes and outcomes in food systems. Without confronting the challenges posed by unchecked power consolidation, corporate political activity and the "commodification" of food, in a system marred by deregulation and externalisation of the environmental and social costs, any attempt at food systems transformation risk to remain superficial and insufficient[79, 80, 81]. **This systems-based assessment points to equity-sensitive strategies as a key leverage point to unlock the transformation of food systems towards sustainability.**

2.2.1 Understanding the basics: inequality and inequity in food systems

Inequalities and inequities are seen across the entire food system, from access to resources for production to participation in markets and access to nutritious food. **It is essential to distinguish between them to diagnose the root causes of dysfunction within global food systems[82]**. Intersecting factors like gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographical location, determine who face marginalisation in, for instance, value chains and governance decisions, and who bears the brunt of environmental and health externalities.

For the purpose of this report, it is important to differentiate between *inequalities* and *inequities* in food systems. Drawing on the work of the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) **inequalities refer to observable differences in the distribution of enabling factors and outcomes** - such as access to food production resources, food system services, and nutrition - **across individuals and groups[83]**. Food systems' inequities are systemic, avoidable, and unjust disparities—rooted in power imbalances, discriminatory structures, or unequal resource distribution—that persist when we fail to address their underlying causes.

Analysing inequalities means measuring and quantifying **the "*what*"**, the tangible disparities in food systems, based on socio-economic status and geographical position. For example, examining regional differences in the prevalence of undernourishment across different regions, or disparities in access to healthy diets between income groups, provides insights into food system inequalities[84, 85].

For instance, data from the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) show that in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 20% of the population remains chronically undernourished, compared to less than 3% in Europe and North America[86]. In high-income countries, access to diverse, healthy, and culturally appropriate diets is increasingly stratified by income level, with low-income households more likely to rely on ultra-processed, nutrient-poor foods[87]. These imbalances restrict access to healthy diets or promote low-quality diets, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations. Increasing the availability of micronutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains is essential to address these disparities.

Inequalities extend beyond food access and nutrition, encompassing environmental resources and exposures. In fact, **environmental inequalities in food systems are increasingly recognised as key contributors to both human and planetary health challenges**. Marginalised and low-income communities, particularly in the Global South but also in underserved regions of high-income countries, are disproportionately exposed to environmental harms driven by dominant agricultural and food industry practices[88]. These communities are also more vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods, or heatwaves, which threaten food production and livelihoods. At the same time, communities living near polluting food industry infrastructure, such as meatpacking plants, waste lagoons, or pesticide-intensive farms, face elevated risks of respiratory illness, waterborne diseases, and even cancer[89, 90].

An analysis of food systems' **inequities**, on the other hand, focuses on **understanding the underlying, avoidable, and unjust causes which become evident once we question the "*why*" behind disparities**. Looking at equity means questioning whether and how measurable differences are rooted in social, economic, political and historical processes that create systematic disadvantages for certain groups. Inequities stem from asymmetries in social position, discrimination, power, and historical processes. They are inherently related to how power is distributed across social groups, both within and outside the food system. The marginalization of the poor, women, and indigenous peoples from access to land and resources, and the power asymmetries that prioritise the interests of corporations, elites, and high-income countries over marginalised communities and the Global South are examples of systemic unfairness that leads to inequitable dynamics in food systems, from who gets to access resources to how nutrition outcomes are distributed[91, 92, 93].

For example, **gender-based inequities** mean that women - who make up over 60% of the agricultural labour force in some regions - own less than 15% of the land globally[94]. Indigenous Peoples, despite stewarding over 80% of the world's biodiversity, are frequently excluded from decisions about land use, conservation, and agricultural investment[95]. Such inequities also include lack of political representation, exclusion from value chains, discriminatory access to credit or technology, and systematic underinvestment in the infrastructure and services needed to support equitable and localised food systems[96]. Similarly, small-scale farmers - despite playing a central role in preserving agrobiodiversity and supporting local economies by reducing vulnerability to market shocks - often face great hurdles in accessing productive resources, public financing, and in having their interests meaningfully represented in decision-making processes[97].

Environmental inequities emerge when these same power dynamics shape who bears the costs of environmental degradation and who benefits from environmental resources. The current food system externalises environmental costs onto those least responsible for creating them - whether through exploitative labour in environmentally hazardous conditions, lack of opportunity due to land, asset, finance and subsidy concentration, or displacement due to land grabbing. Furthermore, these environmental inequities are self-reinforcing: as ecosystems degrade and climate change accelerates, it is often those communities that are already disadvantaged that see their land become less fertile, their water scarcer, and their health more fragile - thus perpetuating the cycle of vulnerability[98].

Addressing inequities means understanding how different forms of disadvantage and systemic exclusion interact in the lived experiences of affected communities. It also means recognising

that these systems of exclusion are not accidental but constructed, shaped by histories of colonial expansion, capitalist extraction, racialised and gendered labour hierarchies and land rights, and exploitative trade regimes. **Recognising these structural drivers is the first step toward enacting systems that are equitable by design, rather than exclusionary by default.** Box 2 delves into the historical processes that shaped food systems and determined the unequal distribution of one of their key resources: land.

Efforts to redistribute power, re-value the social-ecological qualities of food, and centre justice in food systems governance are essential. Wealthier countries and societal groups, as major beneficiaries of these systemic arrangements, bear a *de facto* responsibility to support structural redress. For instance, there is a growing consensus on the need for high-income nations to financially and institutionally support low-income countries in overcoming both historical and present-day inequities[99, 100]. **This requires embedding food system solutions within a broader rethinking of the political economy centred around global justice**, and operationalised through the equitable leveraging of international financing mechanisms and multilateral governance.

BOX 2: POWER, INEQUITIES, AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES IN FOOD SYSTEMS

A historical process

Since the post-World War II era, the global shift toward export-oriented, industrial agriculture, intensified by neoliberal policies, has marginalised small-scale farmers and entrenched extractivist models that prioritise profit over people and planet. These systems have favoured agribusiness consolidation, foreign acquisitions of resources, and commercial monocultures, often at the expense of local food sovereignty and community resilience, particularly in the Global South. The focus on economies of scale and market expansion has driven resource dispossession, environmental degradation, and deepened socio-economic disparities[101].

Simultaneously, deregulation, trade liberalization, and corporate-friendly policies have enabled the financialization of food and unprecedented consolidation of control by a handful of transnational corporations. These actors dominate every stage of the food chain and shape regulations and policies in their favour, reducing consumer choice, and eroding democratic oversight. Flawed policy frameworks have prioritised efficiency and profit, consistently sidelining sustainability, equity, and the public interest[102, 103, 104, 105].

A closer look at land - who owns it, and why

One of the clearest manifestations of structural injustice in food systems is **land inequality**, the stark disparity in land ownership, access, and control across different social groups and geographies. Access to land remains one of the most significant determinants of power, food security, and socio-economic well-being. Yet globally, land continues to be unequally distributed, with smallholder and indigenous farmers systematically excluded of their rights and access, particularly in the Global South. According to the International Land Coalition, the top 1% of farms globally operate more than 70% of the world's farmland, while over 80% of all farms are smaller than 2 hectares but control just 12% of agricultural land[106] .

These disparities reflect deep-seated **land inequities**: avoidable, unjust systems rooted in colonial and non-colonial land dispossession, discriminatory laws, patriarchal inheritance systems, and policy bias favouring large-scale, industrial agriculture[107]. Land inequities manifest in the systemic marginalization of local communities, who are often excluded from land titling processes, financing, and decision-making spaces.

The contemporary phenomenon of land grabbing, mostly exemplified by large-scale acquisitions by private corporations, governments, and financial actors, has intensified these inequities. Since the 2008 global food price crisis, transnational land deals have surged, often justified in the name of "food security," "green energy," or "development." In practice, these deals often lead to the displacement of local populations, erosion of customary land rights, and the loss of food sovereignty[108]. Fertile land is frequently redirected toward export-oriented monocultures, biofuels, or speculative capital, severing cultural and ecological ties between people and land, while reducing local resilience to market and climate shocks[109].

Without confronting the unequal distribution of land, wealth, and power, attempts to create just and sustainable food systems will risk reinforcing the very systems of exclusion they seek to dismantle[110]. For a detailed example of land reform in practice, see Case Study 7 on Scotland's recent initiatives.

Understanding and addressing food system inequities at their root requires bridging insights from social sciences and political economy. These perspectives help illuminate how structural imbalances have shaped current dysfunctions. At the same time, they point to **concrete opportunities for shifting these dynamics in support of more equitable and sustainable outcomes.** The following section examines the forces that have driven these imbalances and considers alternative pathways for reform.

2.2.2 How profit-driven logic and power concentration entrench inequities

Power in food systems remains concentrated in the hands of large, transnational corporations, financial actors, and policy elites. Under an extractive model that prioritises shareholder profit-maximisation, deregulation pegged with economic liberalisation that induces business concentration, and narrowly defined growth, food has been transformed from a shared basic necessity into a globally traded commodity[111, 112]. This corporate food regime is characterised by dominant value chain actors - grown out of permissive mergers & acquisitions legislation - pursuing transnational, export-oriented, and industrialised systems that have escalated the use of chemical-intensive agriculture, industrial aquaculture, factory farming, and the widespread adoption of genetic technology[113, 114, 115]. The vision of food as a commodity has for long shaped policies, science, and market dynamics, while constraining producer and consumer choices, and failing to account for externalities produced by these dynamics[116]. Within these patterns, food systems often risk starting to work to the detriment of local economies, ecosystems, and communities[117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123].

This concentration of power is actively exercised in ways that entrench systemic, crises-driving lock-ins and block transformative change. Recent analysis from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), drawing on the "four arenas of power" framework[124], further reveal

how such asymmetries are sustained not only through institutional and market control but also through less visible means, such as shaping narratives, norms, and the very boundaries of policy discourse[125]. Through these practices, if unchecked, corporate actors can extend their influence across agricultural inputs and outputs, production and distribution, as well as the policy and scientific environments in which food systems are governed[126, 127, 128]. Corporate influence, through lobbying, campaign funding, and regulatory capture, can become particularly problematic. For instance, in the US alone, agribusiness spent over $500 million lobbying Congress between 2019 and 2023, vastly outspending public interest groups[129]. Since the main mission of corporate entities is to continuously increase economic gains, it is unsurprising that they have been often found to actively block or weaken reforms that could hamper this mission - even when these reforms are aimed at improving environmental safeguards, labour protections, and public health[130, 131].

BOX 3: APPLYING THE COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH FRAMEWORK TO FOOD SYSTEMS

The Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH) framework provides a valuable lens to expose how corporate practices can shape food system outcomes related to human and planetary health and equity. It draws attention to questions of power and to the broader political, economic, and social strategies used to maximise profit at the expense of public health and environmental sustainability[132].

The proliferation of UPFs is a case in point. Their high profitability, driven by low-cost ingredients, engineered hyper-palatability, extended shelf life, and global-scale distribution, makes them central to the strategies of food corporations focused on increasing shareholder returns. Market logic rewards volume and margin over nutritional value and sustainability. Heavily subsidised inputs such as refined grains, sugars, and oils make UPFs artificially cheap, while economies of scale and global supply chains further entrench their market dominance[133]. This exemplifies how, when food is treated as a speculative commodity, healthier, less processed and less environmentally harmful options are displaced, unsustainable production practices are entrenched, and socioeconomic inequalities deepened[134, 135].

The CDoH framework is crucial for understanding and tackling these dynamics. It highlights the systems, practices, and institutional mechanisms through which commercial actors, both large and small, influence human and planetary health and equity outcomes[136]. When applied to harmful products and practices, a CDoH analysis reveals how power asymmetries and systemic lock-ins maintain profit-maximising pattern while constraining healthier, more equitable and more sustainable alternatives, and highlights why systemic policy interventions are urgently needed[137, 138].

Importantly, these dynamics don't operate in isolation but are embedded in a global economic system that favours deregulation, trade liberalisation, and financialisation. Transnational corporations often deploy shared tactics to resist regulation and steer global food systems in their favour. Their influence is often reinforced by national geopolitical interests: governments frequently act to protect and promote "their" corporations on the global stage, treating them as strategic assets tied to economic growth, employment, and influence. Market concentration enables corporations to maintain oligopolistic control, manipulate pricing, and

avoid responsibility for the externalities they create, undermining the legitimacy and capacity of public institutions to act in public interest[139]. This alignment of state and corporate interests contributes to the political inertia that makes it difficult to enact transformative change - even when it's clear that the same commercial systems that fuel the epidemic of NCDs also intensify climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution[140]. **Figure X** visualizes the CDoH model.

The CDoH in Practice

The CDoH framework identifies a range of interlinked practices that systematically undermine health, equity, and sustainability:

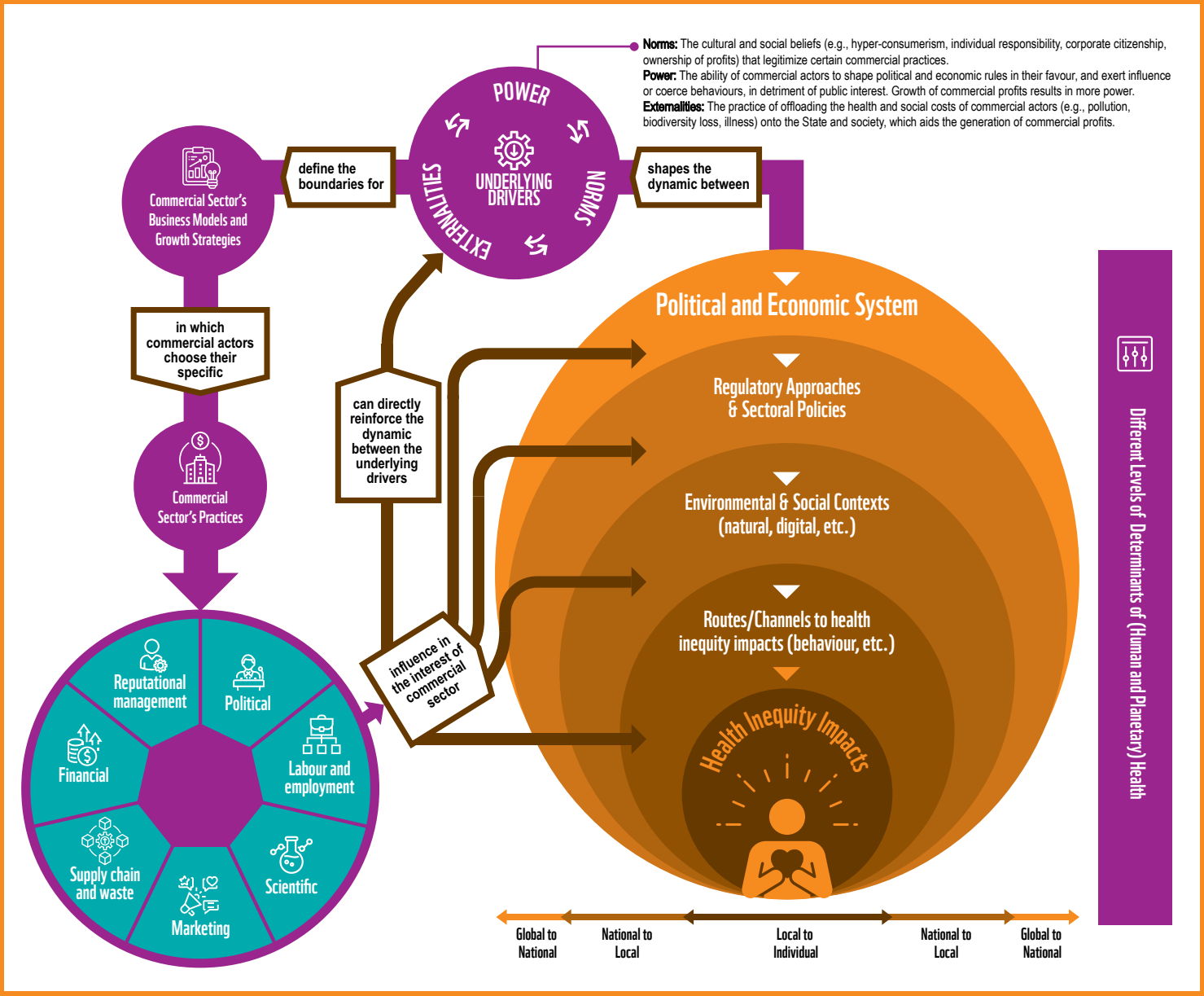
- **Political practices:** Lobbying, campaign financing, and legal action to block or dilute regulation, shape trade agreements, and undermine public health measures.
- **Scientific practices**: Manipulation or funding for research to generate favourable findings, create doubt about scientific consensus, or delay regulation.
- **Marketing practices**: Targeted advertising of harmful products, often aimed at children and low-income populations, that normalise unhealthy consumption.
- **Supply chain and waste practices**: Industrial production methods that prioritise volume and profit, often at the cost of environmental sustainability, labour rights, and food quality.
- **Labour and employment practices:** Exploitative working conditions in supply chains, including wage suppression, and weak or absent labour rights.
- **Financial practices:** Tax avoidance, transfer pricing, and speculative activity that reduces public revenue and increases disparities.
- **Reputational management practices:** Corporate social responsibility initiatives that obscure harmful practices and pre-empt regulatory scrutiny.

Figure 2. Diagram illustrating the elements of the CDoH framework. The left-hand side set of circles represent the seven practices that can harm (human and planetary) health. The concentric half-circles depict elements, activities, sectors, institutions or legislation, inter alia, that can be shaped and influenced by commercial actor practices at different scales - from individual to local to global. Based on Gilmore et al. (2023)[141]

Effectively addressing the CDoH requires a paradigm shift: away from voluntary self-regulation and corporate-first governance, and toward robust public regulation, democratic oversight, and equitable redistribution of power. This includes confronting the financialisation of food systems as a structural obstacle to sustainability and equity, and imagining alternatives grounded in human and planetary rights, social justice, and ecological integrity.

In parallel, strategic policy sequencing and the collective organization of movements opposing harmful practices can generate positive tipping points in public discourse and regulation. Early, persistent action and coalition-building are critical in reshaping both the political narrative and institutional frameworks.

FIGURE 2:THE ELEMENTS OF THE CDOH FRAMEWORK



Governments worldwide are often constrained by entrenched path dependencies shaped by decades adopting neoliberal economic logic and framings, leading to deregulation, financialization and extractive profit-maximization policies[142, 143, 144]. These frameworks have perpetuated power imbalances and privileged market-based solutions, making it ever more difficult to bring to the fore the structural reforms necessary to address the deep-rooted crises in food systems. The practices outlined in the CDoH framework shed light on how commercial actors frequently exert disproportionate influence over policy processes, further restricting the ability of governments to advance sustainable food systems transformation[145]. Additionally, major agribusiness and food corporations use crises, whether climate shocks, pandemics, or supply chain disruptions, to further consolidate control, deflect scrutiny, and reinforce the narrative that industrial food production is the only viable way to "feed the world"[146].

2.2.3 What can be done differently?

Encouragingly, meaningful alternatives exist to currently dominant framings and practices shaping food systems. **Reframing food not merely as a market commodity, but as a fundamental human right, reveals critical tensions within current structures that, if addressed, hold significant promise for achieving more equitable and sustainable outcomes**[147].

Addressing structural inequities requires going beyond narrow framings that prioritise shareholder dividends, technocratic approaches to food security or production efficiency. Instead, it demands a **reorientation of food systems that fully integrates both the economic and human rights dimensions of food.** Just as healthcare and education are widely recognised as essential public goods central to human wellbeing, similarly, **food possesses intrinsic value for dignified human life that surpasses its commodity status**. Access to nutritious food is a basic human necessity, and as such should not be contingent on people's purchasing power. In turn, access to sustainable food that does not compromise a healthy environment is also a human right, thus strengthening further the argument that money availability should not determine which people can enjoy their rights, and which cannot. There is substantial potential for transformative progress when food systems are reframed to emphasise their foundational role in supporting human life, health, social and ecological integrity. Recognising food's unique status demands governance frameworks that are explicitly grounded in principles of justice, equity, and public accountability, which offer hope for reshaping food systems toward genuinely inclusive and sustainable futures.

The vision of decommodifying essential goods and services and reconfiguring markets to serve the public interest – in other words, ensuring and materializing a human right - is not without precedent. The municipalization of water and energy services has been taking place in cities around the world, including Paris and Berlin, reflecting a broader push to reclaim public control over vital resources[148, 149, 150]. The movement for housing as a human right has gained traction in cities like Barcelona and Singapore, challenging the speculative dynamics that have turned shelter into an investment vehicle rather than a universal necessity[151]. In tobacco control, sustained advocacy and political commitment has led to taxation, regulation, advertising bans, and ultimately the denormalisation of a health-harming industry, and similar dynamics are increasingly visible in relation to alcohol harms[152]. In the renewable energy sector, growth has been driven by State-owned companies given the resistance from fossil vested interests, who have even lower incentives due to the decline in costs (and thus of profits) of clean energy and storage[153]. These cases demonstrate that **reversing commodification is both politically possible and materially effective**. Within food systems, there are also some great examples of decommodification. As malnutrition costs the global economy ~$3.5 trillion/year (WHO) – but more importantly, it's immoral – several countries from Brazil (see case study 5) to Finland have developed universal school meal programs, where taxes (a redistributive mechanism) fund the materialization of the right to food for children, reducing inequality. Further transformation to substantiate the human right to food and to a healthy environment will require political will, imaginative policy design, and structural reform that redistributes power toward communities, public institutions, and stakeholders acting in the public interest.

Civil society plays a critical role in this shift. Advocacy campaigns, watchdog coalitions, public interest litigation, and grassroots mobilisation help uncover harmful practices, reshape public narratives, and push

for regulatory reforms and policies that reassert and protect the public interest. By amplifying the voices of those most affected, an active and independent civil society fosters democratic participation, strengthens accountability, and can provide valuable input to public regulations and public policy reforms – ultimately contributing to the development of healthier and more just food systems[154].

The private sector also plays a key role in this transformation. There are promising examples of food businesses contributing to a number of sustainability and equity goals[155]. Social enterprises, B-Corps, and cooperatives that prioritise ethical sourcing, fair wages, and regenerative agriculture offer alternative models that align business with public and planetary good[156]. For instance, values-based food chains (VBFCs) foster long-term, trust-based relationships between producers and buyers, redistributing value more fairly along the supply chain[157]. Similarly, agroecological startups, community-supported agriculture schemes, and urban food cooperatives are demonstrating that private actors - especially small- and medium-sized enterprises - can deliver nutritious, culturally appropriate food while supporting local economies and environmental resilience[158, 159]. Initiatives like Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Big Food Redesign Challenge demonstrates how major food brands and retailers can apply circular economy principles: redesigning product portfolios enables nature-positive foods that deliver environmental, economic, and health benefits at scale[160, 161]. These examples show that the private sector, when transparent, accountable and sustainability-driven, can be a vital ally in food systems transformation.

Ultimately, governments and public institutions at local, national, and transnational levels hold the authority, responsibility and mandate to foster these enabling environments. By supporting meaningful civil society participation and incentivising ethical business practices, public institutions can facilitate transformative shifts towards genuinely equitable, sustainable, and resilient food systems. In this sense, in 2024, Member States in the UN Committee for World Food Security (CFS) – which, since its reform in 2009, is the first UN committee allowing inclusive participation of civil society – agreed on a set of *Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition*[162]. The recommendations were negotiated based on the set of comprehensive actions that had been listed by the CFS-HLPE's report "Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition", published a year earlier. These recommendations are a great achievement. However, they should be considered as a great starting point rather than as a final goal as there are several gaps. Furthermore, the CFS Recommendations are numerous: a total of 58 actions across 10 areas. The significant number of recommendations, and the absence of specific guidance on their implementation, could become overwhelming for policymakers, risking policy paralysis in such a critical area to overcome humanity's interconnected crises. **This report's own recommendations section (Section 5.) aims to start bridging these gaps**. In this way, this report intends to become a guidance tool for policymakers to better understand vital aspects for the development of roadmaps and actions plans for equity-driven food systems transformations.

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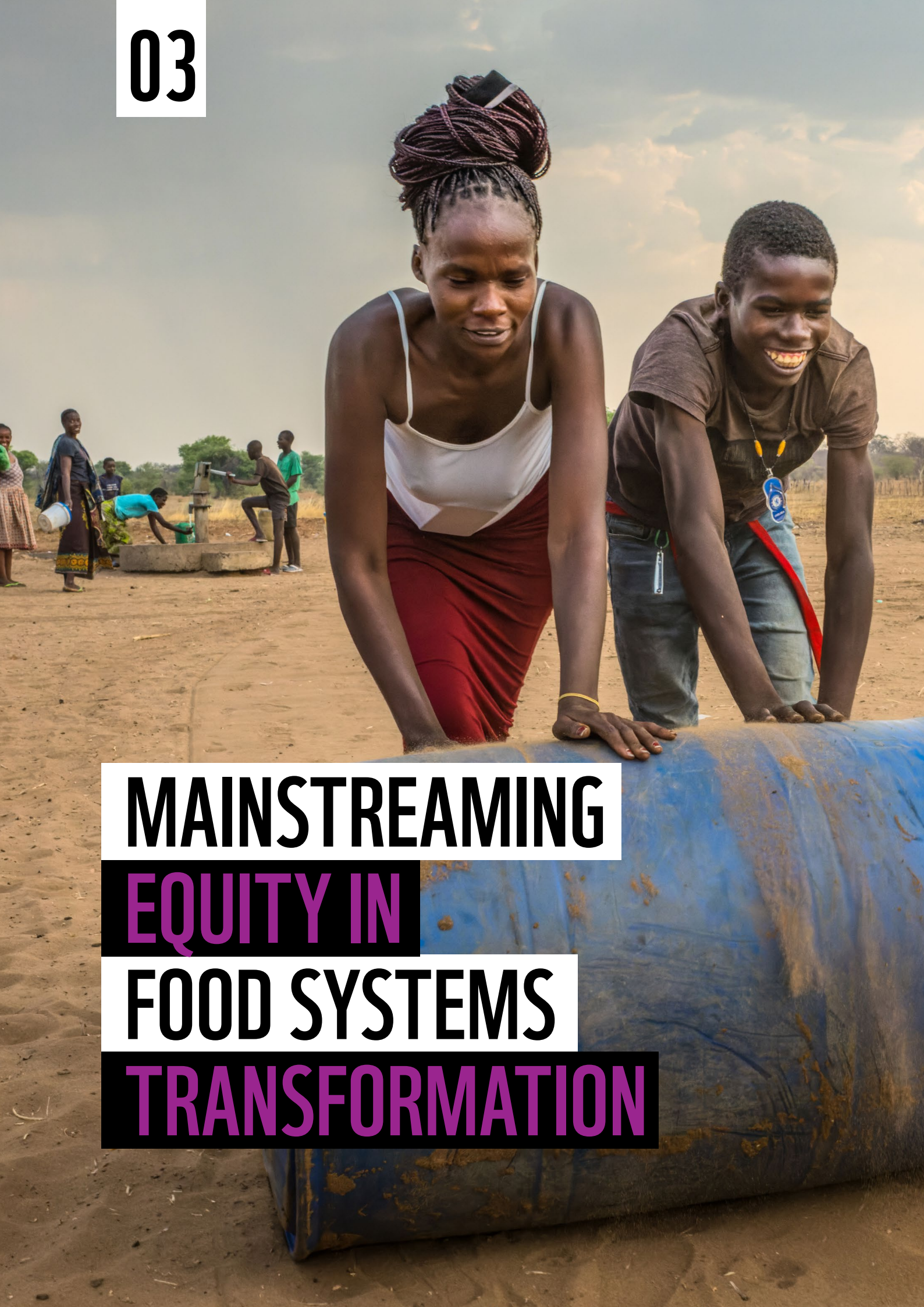

MAINSTREAMING EQUITY IN FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Equity is a powerful catalyst for change. At a time when global food systems are marked by overlapping challenges and widespread disparities, centring equity offers a concrete and hopeful pathway forward.

An equity-sensitive approach to sustainable food systems transformation recognises that meaningful change must begin by addressing the structural disparities that marginalise communities and distort access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power. This approach **unlocks proven solutions that emphasises fairness, sustainability and long-term effectiveness**, reimagining transformation not as a top-down, technocratic design but rather as a collective rebalancing of benefits and burdens in food systems[163].

To operationalise equity in food systems transformation, it is crucial to understand how it functions across different dimensions. Drawing on the widely recognised model articulated by Fraser in 2005[164], this chapter begins by unpacking the three core dimensions of equity that shape interactions, distribution of power and outcomes within food systems. Building on this foundation, the chapter then explores a wide array of frameworks that have emerged to guide the implementation of equity-sensitive strategies. These insights aim to support policymakers, equity and food system professionals, civil society organizations and commercial actors in designing food systems that centre equity at every stage.

3.1 The dimensions of equity in food systems

To effectively design and implement equity-sensitive strategies, this report identified the following **three dimensions of equity** as key to food system transformation (summarized in **Figure X**):

1) Distributive equity: This dimension, often referred to as distributive justice, **focuses on the fair allocation of resources, benefits and burdens derived from food systems**. It addresses how societal goods, such as wealth, opportunities, and privileges, are distributed among individuals and groups. This includes access to nutritious food, social capital, land, environmental and financial resources, fair wages, healthy work conditions, and economic opportunities - ensuring that all individuals and communities receive their fair share[165]. In the context of globalization, distributive equity extends beyond national borders, addressing disparities between countries. International distributive equity examines how resources, opportunities, and responsibilities should be shared globally, considering factors like historical injustices, economic disparities, and varying capacities among nations[166]. Implementing distributive equity involves addressing complex questions about what constitutes fairness and how to balance need, equality and equity. Additionally, global efforts must consider the diverse cultural, economic, and political contexts of different societies to ensure that distributive justice frameworks are both effective and culturally appropriate[167].

2) Procedural equity: This aspect, also known as procedural justice, **emphasises inclusive and fair decision-making processes**, ensuring that all stakeholders - especially those from marginalised groups - have a genuine opportunity to participate and shape those decision-making processes that affect them**. True procedural equity goes beyond superficial inclusion and tokenistic participation**: it actively seeks to identify, challenge, and correct underlying power imbalances within governance processes and institutional frameworks[168]. Procedural equity is a cornerstone of just and effective governance: simply creating multistakeholder forums without explicitly rooting human rights obligations and addressing imbalances in power, resources, and influence tends to reinforce existing disparities rather than overcome them. One moment that drew global attention to these issues was the UN Secretary-General's 2021 Food Systems Summit. While it contributed to broadening the discourse around food systems transformation and their intersection with global challenges, the summit also sparked critical debate. Many observers noted that its reliance on a multi-stakeholder governance model risked entrenching existing inequities by failing to address power imbalances and bypassing human rights obligations. These dual legacy highlights both the growing visibility of equity concerns and the persistent challenges in realising meaningful, equity-centred governance in global food systems[169, 170].

3) Recognitional equity: This dimension **refers to the fair consideration of how historical processes of discrimination have influenced individuals' and communities' access to resources and opportunities.** This dimension acknowledges that historical and systemic inequities have led to disparities in food access, health outcomes, and economic opportunities among different populations. Consequently, advancing recognitional equity involves tailoring interventions to the unique circumstances of communities, confronting and correcting the legacy of past injustices that continue to shape present disparities[171]. For instance, the concept of **food apartheid** highlights how structural inequalities, rooted in historical processes of racial and economic discrimination, result in unequal access to healthy and affordable food in certain communities. In response, the food

justice movement seeks to rebalance policies and practices by centring the recognition of discriminatory and exclusionary structures as a crucial step toward ensuring equitable access to nutritious food, fair wages for food system workers, and the empowerment of communities to have control over their food systems[172]. Incorporating recognitional equity into food system policies and interventions requires a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by different communities and the development of strategies that address these specific needs. This approach ensures that efforts to improve food systems do not inadvertently perpetuate existing inequities but instead contribute to the overall well-being of all community members.

FIGURE 3. THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF EQUITY

As portrayed in the CFS-HLPE report[173], since food systems are interconnected with a range of systems (housing, water, education, etc.), interventions to redress inequities across the three dimensions can take place both within food systems and in other systems. Building on these foundational dimensions, a growing body of frameworks has emerged to guide how equity can be embedded in practice. The next section explores how diverse actors have translated these principles into actionable strategies for food systems transformation.

3.2 Frameworks for implementing equity-sensitive strategies

Over the past decade, numerous frameworks have emerged to guide the implementation of equity-sensitive strategies as core enablers of food systems transformation. These frameworks have been developed by civil society organizations, public health bodies, international institutions, and researchers. They adopt diverse approaches, focusing on areas such as rights-based governance, gender justice, commercial power dynamics, environmental sustainability, and structural economic reform. Some serve as formal conceptual tools, while others are practical models shaped by frontline advocacy or community-led initiatives. Collectively, **they provide a varied set of strategic approaches that centre equity in both the design and implementation of food systems' policies and interventions**[174].

Equity focus was appraised via directed content analysis of each framework's core documents: equity links were coded as 'direct' when equity was an explicit objective operationalised through redistributive, participatory, or recognition

mechanisms, and 'indirect' when equity effects were ancillary to other aims; equity dimensions (distributive, procedural, recognitional) were assigned based on the presence of corresponding instruments (resource/benefit allocation; decision-making and accountability; acknowledgment of identities/rights/knowledge).

Integrating insights across the frameworks summarised in **Table 3**, recurring action levers were distilled into a practical menu of equity-sensitive strategies. **Section 3.3** will present these strategies by domain (production, consumption, governance), clarifying the equity mechanisms (distributive, procedural, recognitional) they activate.

3.2.1 Agri-food systems transformation protocol (ASTP)

This decision-support tool outlines a four-stage, nine-step iterative protocol to guide inclusive, rights-based, and ecologically sound transformation processes through multilateral governance. It promotes place-based solutions and process integrity to ensure all stakeholders' voices are included[175]. While not centred around equity, this protocol can be leveraged to advance equity-sensitive strategies that ensure iterative, transparent planning and inclusive stakeholder engagement, delivering on procedural, recognitional and distributive dimensions.

3.2.2 Commercial determinants of health framework (CDoH)

Developed across academia and global public health literature, this framework identifies the practices and systemic influences of commercial actors on public health and equity. It categorises harmful corporate practices across marketing, lobbying, labour, finance, and reputational management, advocating for governance solutions that prioritise human and planetary health[176, 177]. This framework indirectly contributes to equity-sensitive transformation by revealing how corporate practices shape inequities, particularly in relation to procedural equity, though recognitional and distributive dimensions remain underdeveloped.

3.2.3 Conceptual framework for national and territorial food systems assessments (CFNTFSA)

This FAO-developed tool supports governments in evaluating food system sustainability and equity at national and sub-national levels. It considers four interconnected dimensions: food and nutrition security, environmental integrity, inclusive livelihoods, and urban–rural territorial balance[178]. This tool supports direct equity-sensitive planning by enabling context-specific analysis and action at territorial scales, with a focus on distributive and recognitional equity.

3.2.4 Collaborative framework for food systems transformation (CSFST)

Designed to assist policymakers and stakeholders in applying a whole-of-systems approach, this framework focuses on leadership, alignment, and inclusive dialogue. It helps build coordination and shared direction among diverse actors engaged in food systems change[179]. It promotes direct procedural and recognitional equity by fostering multi-actor dialogue and inclusive governance, supporting systemic food systems change through shared leadership and co-creation.

3.2.5 Equitable food systems resource guide (EFSRG)

Developed by PolicyLink, this guide provides advocates, community leaders and members, and entrepreneurs with a comprehensive, actionable framework to understand what an equitable food system can look like. It outlines how equity can be embedded across all stages of the food system, from production and processing to distribution, retail, and food waste recovery[180]. Through sector-specific equity snapshots, model policies, and real-world examples of equity in action, the guide supports community-led change that addresses systemic barriers and offers a set of equity-sensitive strategies that integrate distributive, procedural, and recognitional dimensions.

3.2.6 Gender-sensitive value chain framework (GBVC)

Developed by FAO, this framework highlights gender-based disparities in food production, access, and governance, and outlines strategies to dismantle barriers for women. It promotes gender equity as both a standalone goal and a lever for broader food systems sustainability[181]. It offers a direct equity-sensitive approach by addressing structural gender barriers and power dynamics, with clear strategies that cut across distributive, procedural, and recognitional equity.

3.2.7 Great food puzzle framework (GFPF)

Developed by the WWF Food Practice, this framework identifies 20 transformation levers across six strategic action areas: natural resource management, governance and institutions, education and knowledge, technology, trade, and finance. Grounded in a global food systems typology based on environmental and socio-economic indicators, it aims to guide place-based, high-impact actions tailored to local contexts. The framework emphasises closing the "transformation gap" across ambition, strategy, and implementation dimensions, offering tools to prioritise actions that deliver the greatest equity and sustainability returns. While not explicitly framed around equity, the approach supports equity-sensitive transformation by incorporating smallholder inclusion, support for traditional foods, land tenure reforms, and public procurement, addressing both structural and contextual disparities in food systems[182].

3.2.8 Nutrition equity framework (NEF)

Developed by academia, the NEF is a conceptual model designed to identify and address the root causes of nutrition inequities. It illustrates how social and political processes shape the food, health, and care environments that are crucial to nutritional outcomes. Central to the framework are mechanisms of unfairness, injustice, and exclusion, which drive nutrition inequities across different contexts and generations. By emphasising these socio-political determinants, the NEF advocates for 'equity-sensitive nutrition' interventions that aim to create fair and just opportunities for optimal nutrition for all individuals[183]. This framework directly embeds equity in food and nutrition governance, advancing all three equity dimensions through socio-political analysis and mechanisms of participation, justice, and accountability.

3.2.9 Planet-based diets retailer methodology (PBDRM)

Developed by WWF, this practical framework supports food retailers in aligning product offerings with the Planetary Health Diet, aiming to reduce environmental impact and promote healthier consumption patterns. It provides a stepwise approach to measure and shift sales from animal-based to plant-based foods, while enabling broader analysis of food group distribution. Although not explicitly framed around equity, the methodology supports equity-sensitive transformation by promoting accessible, sustainable diets and encouraging the reduction of ultra-processed and high-impact animal-based foods. By advancing healthier diets with lower environmental footprints, the approach contributes to tackling health and environmental inequalities from a distributive perspective, particularly the disproportionate exposure of low-income communities to diet-related health risks and ecological harms[184].

3.2.10 Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition (RIFSN)

Released by the HLPE-FSN, this framework identifies systemic drivers of inequality across food systems. Centring a reframing of food as a human right, it highlights strategic policy levers to reduce inequities in social protection, land rights, labour, and governance, encouraging governments to adopt a rights-based and equity-sensitive approach[185]. It provides a direct equity-sensitive policy framework that systematically addresses disparities across food systems, targeting all three equity dimensions with actionable, government-led reforms.

3.2.11 SHIFT framework (SHIFT)

Launched by an international team of researchers and hosted by World Health Organization (WHO), the SHIFT Framework focuses on transforming food environments through a health equity lens. It complements existing initiatives addressing malnutrition and NCDs, and it is structured around four adaptable steps: Map, Engage, Transform, and Monitor[186]. The Framework targets both settings (e.g. schools, workplaces, communities) and vulnerable groups, using guiding questions and linked best practices to support context-specific interventions. It provides a direct equity-sensitive approach by transforming food environments to reduce structural health disparities, with a focus on distributive and recognitional equity and elements of procedural inclusion.

These frameworks collectively reflect a wide spectrum of entry points into food systems transformation – which in turn can be grouped across the three dimensions of production, consumption and governance. To better understand how they operationalise equity, the **Table 4** below synthesises their core focuses, policy areas, their direct or indirect link to equity consideration, and the specific dimensions of equity they target. This comparative view helps clarify where different frameworks converge or complement each other, offering practical guidance for governments, civil society, and institutions seeking to embed equity across production, consumption, and governance domains.

TABLE 4. COMPARATIVE VIEW OF HOW THE LISTED FRAMEWORKS OPERATIONALISE EQUITY (THROUGH THEIR CORE FOCUSES, POLICY AREAS, DIRECT OR INDIRECT LINK TO EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS, AND THE SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS OF EQUITY THEY TARGET)

Framework	Abbreviation	Focus	Policy Area	Equity link	Equity dimension (Distributive - D; Procedural - P; Recognition - R)		
Agri-food systems transformation protocol	ASTP	Iterative system planning	Multi-stakeholder planning cycles; Local strategy development	⚠ Indirect ensures inclusion and transparency in transformation processes.	D	P	R
CDoH Framework	CDoH	Corporate Accountability	Regulate marketing of harmful products; counter corporate influence	⚠ Indirect critiques corporate power and influence undermining health and equity.		P	
Conceptual framework for national and territorial food systems assessments	CFNTFSA	Place-based diagnostics	Urban gardening initiatives; local food access planning	☑ Direct supports tailored, context-sensitive equity actions based on spatial analysis.		P	R
Collaborative framework for food systems transformation	CSFST	Multi-stakeholder governance	Local food policy councils; participatory policy design	☑ Direct ensures procedural equity and inclusive decision-making in policy processes.		P	R
Equitable food systems resource guide	EFSRG	Community co-governance	Production, processing, distribution, retail, recovering, recycling and waste	☑ Direct Designed to operationalize food justice via local, community-led solutions.	D	P	R
Gender-sensitive value chain framework	GBVC	Gender & intersectional justice	Equitable public procurement; nutrition-sensitive protection	☑ Direct addresses structural barriers for women and marginalised genders in food systems.	D	P	R
Great food puzzle framework	GFPF	Systemic transformation across multiple levers	Natural resource management; trade; land tenure; finance; public procurement	⚠ Indirect integrates place-based, inclusive, and context-specific approaches, acknowledges historical injustices, and prioritises interventions relevant to marginalised groups	D	P	R
Nutrition equity framework	NEF	Equity-focused Policy and Governance	Equity-focused data collection; redistributive policies (land reform, gender-positive performs); social accountability mechanisms	☑ Direct focuses on embedding principles of participation, non-discrimination, and legal accountability in food governance to tackle systemic inequities.	D	P	R

Framework	Abbreviation	Focus	Policy Area	Equity link	Equity dimension (Distributive - D; Procedural - P; Recognition - R)		
Planet-based diets retailer methodology	PBDRM	Retailer-led dietary transition	Food environment; protein transition; product reformulation	⚠ Indirect promotes healthy, low-impact diets that can contribute to mitigating environmental inequalities and reducing diet-related health disparities.	D		
Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition	RIFSN	Inequality reduction and right-based governance	Nutrition-sensitive protection; equity metrics & monitoring	☑ Direct explicitly identifies and addresses systemic inequality across food chains through a human rights approach.	D	P	R
SHIFT framework	SHIFT	Healthy food environments	Sugar tax & subsidies; regulate marketing to children	☑ Direct targets social determinants of health, reshaping environments to reduce health disparities.	D	P	R

3.3 Key areas for equity-sensitive actions

Based on the equity-sensitive frameworks provided, a variety of **strategies** have been identified **across the main food system domains - production**, **consumption** and **governance** - for their **potential to promote equity**.

3.3.1 Production: reclaiming control over food systems

The production sector plays a critical role in addressing the systemic failures and inequities embedded in food systems worldwide. Reshaping its dynamics, particularly in relation to resource access, market structures, and agricultural practices, **is essential to building equitable and sustainable systems**. As outlined in the frameworks by the FAO, HLPE-FSN, and a range of civil society initiatives, - and further affirmed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP)* - addressing structural inequities entrenched in food production requires specific strategies: securing land and water rights, promoting diversified farming systems, supporting agroecological transitions, and valuing traditional and community knowledge[187, 188, 189]. These strategies, which align with UNDROP's principles of protecting peasants' rights to land, seeds, and equitable resource access, redistribute power and resources to historically marginalised communities and producers, promoting agroecological and culturally appropriate farming practices, and transforming markets to reward social and ecological value over volume and scale.

Securing equitable land and water rights is foundational to transforming food production, as underscored by UNDROP's call for states to uphold peasants' rights to natural resources. Strengthening equitable rights over natural resources addresses inequities that prevent many from fully participating in this domain. For instance, secure land tenure provides local populations with the stability needed to invest in and improve their land, leverage financial services, and engage actively in markets, enhancing their economic stability and empowerment[190]. Enhanced land rights also contribute to increased agricultural productivity and sustainability, fostering food security and economic resilience[191].

Diversifying agricultural systems is crucial for embedding resilience, equity, and sustainability in food production. Employing polycultures, intercropping, integrated livestock systems, and agroforestry enhances soil health, reduces pest and disease risks, increases biodiversity and resilience to climate shocks[192]. This diversification mitigates economic risks by providing multiple income streams, especially vital for marginalised communities vulnerable to market fluctuations and environmental harm[193]. Additionally, diverse agricultural practices enable producers to cater better to local and traditional diets, enriching the cultural and social dimensions of food systems. Policies promoting diverse, nutritious crops and ecological farming methods, coupled with reevaluated agricultural subsidies and support systems favouring small-scale producers, are essential to realign food systems with broader public health, environmental, and economic goals, reducing dependency on single-crop economies and enhancing local food security[194].

Traditional and community knowledge plays a vital role in sustainable agriculture. This includes but is not limited to Indigenous knowledge systems: it also encompasses the local practices and insights of smallholder farmers worldwide. These knowledge systems offer place-based understandings of ecosystem management, seed diversity, and food traditions. Recognising and supporting these forms of knowledge challenges dominant corporate models and affirms the value of culturally grounded, community-led agricultural practices[195].

Agroecology offers powerful alternatives to industrial agriculture by promoting regenerative farming rooted in traditional knowledge. This transformative approach incorporates ecological and social principles into sustainable food system management. It optimises natural processes, reduces external inputs, and enhances biodiversity, emphasising social equity and economic viability[196]. Agroecological practices significantly empower farmers and communities, supporting participatory decision-making and advocating food sovereignty, which refers to the right of communities to define their food systems independently[197]. Transitioning to agroecology requires robust policy support, community engagement, and a fundamental shift in agricultural paradigms to foster environmentally sound and socially just agricultural practices[198].

Values-Based Food Chains (VBFCs) build transparent, trust-based supply chains grounded in shared social, environmental, and economic values. By fostering collaborative relationships and equitable profit distribution among producers and buyers, VBFCs offer a meaningful alternative to conventional commodity markets. They enhance economic stability for small-scale farmers, promote sustainable production practices, and actively challenge exploitative market dynamics, aligning food chains more closely with principles of equity and sustainability[199, 200].

Equitable institutional purchasing leverages public procurement to support smallholder, local, and sustainable producers, significantly enhancing equity and sustainability in food systems. Institutional purchasing initiatives, such as school meal programs, can strengthen local food economies, create reliable market opportunities, and encourage agricultural practices that benefit public health, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion[201].

Table 5 links these production level strategies with the frameworks discussed in the previous section of this report, highlighting key actions and relevant equity domains.

TABLE 5. PRODUCTION LEVEL STRATEGIES, RELATED FRAMEWORKS, KEY ACTIONS AND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

Production level strategies	Related Frameworks	Approach and Actions	Equity Dimensions
Equitable land and water rights	RIFSN, GFPF	Secure tenure, legal recognition, policy reforms enabling access and control by marginalised communities	D, P, R
Diversified agricultural systems	CFNTFSA, NEF, GFPF	Support for polycultures, agroforestry, and nutrition-sensitive crop production	D, R
Agroecological transitions	ASTP	Community engagement, participatory farming systems, reduced chemical inputs	D, P, R
Recognition of traditional/ community knowledge	CSFST, GFPF	Policy and education support for Indigenous and local practices	R
Values-Based Food Chains (VBFCs)	GBVC, EFSRG	Fair distribution of value, cooperative and transparent trading practices	D, P
Equitable institutional purchasing	SHIFT, GBVC, PBDRM	Support local, sustainable producers through public procurement policies	D, P, R

3.3.2 Consumption: shaping equitable, healthier food environments

Unpacking and addressing deeply rooted inequities in food consumption is crucial to promoting sustainable food systems. The prevalent trend towards homogeneous diets, heavily reliant on processed foods, undermines nutritional diversity, cultural food traditions, public health and environmental outcomes[202]. **Equity-sensitive strategies must therefore specifically tackle the power asymmetries that shape corporate-dominated food environments**, in order to expand access to diverse, nutritious, sustainably produced, and culturally appropriate diets. Achieving this objective necessitates coordinated approaches across public health, finance, urban planning, and community engagement sectors.

Ensuring equity in food environments requires addressing disparities in access to healthy foods. Underserved communities frequently live in areas commonly referred to as food deserts, characterised by limited availability of affordable, nutritious food outlets, exacerbating health inequities[203]. **Healthy Food Financing Initiatives** (HFFIs), often funded through blended finance models combining private, public, and philanthropic capital, can mitigate these issues by investing in food retail infrastructure in underserved areas, enhancing local access to healthier options, and fostering community economic growth[204]. However, these initiatives are typically market-driven and may not inherently address deeper structural inequities unless equity considerations are explicitly embedded in their design. This distinguishes them from the equity-oriented public investment strategies discussed in the governance domain, which aim to shift systemic priorities toward social justice, environmental sustainability, and community-led food systems[205].

Labelling & marketing regulation is key in steering consumer preferences toward healthier options. Clear labelling that transparently communicates nutritional content empowers informed consumer decisions, reducing reliance

on unhealthy processed foods. CDoH plays a significant role in shaping dietary habits, as marketing strategies often promote unhealthy food choices[206]. Restricting marketing, particularly targeted at children, significantly mitigates advertising influences contributing to unhealthy diets, obesity, and other diet-related NCDs. By addressing these commercial determinants, policies can create a healthier food environment that supports informed consumer choices and promotes public health[207].

Equity-oriented fiscal policies are also pivotal in shaping dietary habits and influencing consumer behaviour towards healthier choices. Taxing foods high in unhealthy fats, sugars, or salt can ensure that these products are not cheaper than healthy, fresh and local foods. Conversely, subsidies can make healthier options like fruits and vegetables more affordable and accessible, promoting their consumption[208]. Therefore, with the right design and implementation, these financial strategies can significantly improve population health[209, 210], while contributing to reducing the environmental footprint of food systems, reorienting them towards foods that require fewer processing, packaging and transportation[211].

Urban farmers' markets effectively reshape consumption and production patterns by promoting local food economies and direct-to-consumer sales of fresh produce. Farmers' markets, especially when complemented by urban food growing practices, foster resilience by creating sustainable, localised food systems capable of withstanding economic and environmental disruptions. These initiatives can also contribute to address the challenges posed by urban food deserts, thus contributing to greater nutritional equity within cities. Moreover, they hold potential to foster a collective sense of responsibility, strengthen community ties, and enhance food literacy - exposing communities to the practice and benefits of sustainable farming practices, a particularly valuable assets in urban areas often disconnected from agriculture[212].

Food sovereignty movements advocate for community-led control over food systems, emphasising culturally appropriate food practices and traditional dietary customs. Food choices deeply reflect identity, tradition, and social norms, and are shaped by both individual preferences and collective consumption patterns[213]. Ensuring cultural food security - the ability to access foods aligning with heritage and local identity – can enhance nutritional diversity, strengthen community cohesion, preserve traditional knowledge, and empower communities to resist corporate-driven food consumption, fostering resilience against global market fluctuations[214, 215, 216, 217]. Nonetheless, culturally significant diets should be critically assessed to ensure their environmental sustainability, balancing heritage with environmental responsibility.

Table 6 links these consumption level strategies with the frameworks discussed in section 3.2 of this report, highlighting key actions and relevant equity domains.

TABLE 6. CONSUMPTION LEVEL STRATEGIES, RELATED FRAMEWORKS, KEY ACTIONS AND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

Consumption level strategies	Related Frameworks	Approach and Actions	Equity Dimensions
Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (HFFI)	EFSRG, RIFSN	Invest in food retail in underserved areas; expand access to healthy, affordable foods; foster local economic development	D, R
Labelling & marketing regulation	SHIFT, CDoH	Implement clear nutrition labels; restrict unhealthy food marketing, especially to children	D, P
Equity-oriented fiscal policies	SHIFT, NEF, CDoH, PBDRM	Tax unhealthy food products; subsidise fruits, vegetables, and whole foods to shift consumption patterns	D, R
Urban farmers' markets	CFNTFSA, CSFST, GFPF	Promote direct-to-consumer produce sales; support urban farming; enhance food literacy	D, R
Food sovereignty movements	ASTP	Community-led food governance; support traditional diets; resist corporate influence	P, R

3.3.3 Governance: balancing economic, social and environmental priorities

Governance structures serve as the backbone of food systems, influencing how resources are allocated, who holds decision-making authority, and how economic, social, and environmental priorities are balanced. When these structures are weak or disproportionately influenced by powerful actors, disparities intensify, and unsustainable practices continue unabated. **Transforming food governance requires a combination of strategies, institutional reforms, and multi-sectoral collaboration that is equity-sensitive at all levels, from local to global** (read more on international policy instruments in Box 4).

Achieving **inclusive decision-making** is key and can be promoted via establishing structures such as committees, councils or platforms that actively involve exploited, marginalised and underrepresented groups[218] The lack of representative mechanisms in corporate governance, for instance, means that decisions are often driven by short-term financial gains, sidelining local communities, small-scale producers, and other key stakeholders. This dynamic reinforces entrenched power imbalances, favouring rapid market expansion over sustainable, inclusive practices. Achieving inclusive decision-making requires embedding gender and racial equity considerations into data collection, institutional structures and processes, so that they can uncover systemic challenges, inform effective solutions, and ensure meaningful inclusion of diverse communities. This transformation must focus on co-designing and co-creating solutions that reflect the needs and values of diverse communities, with great potential to invigorate local economies and strengthen food systems in an equitable way[219].

Framing food systems through a **human rights-based approach** offers a powerful foundation for building equitable, inclusive, and accountable governance. This approach can provide a unifying framework to address structural disparities, promote fairness in decision-making and resource distribution, and ensure equitable access to adequate nutrition. The Right to Food Guidelines, adopted by the FAO in 2004, provide

a comprehensive guide for states to implement this right, emphasising the obligations to protect and fulfil food-related entitlements while advancing social justice across food systems[220]. Complementing these guidelines, the UNDROP explicitly upholds the rights of small-scale food producers—including to land, seeds, biodiversity, and participation in policymaking—further anchoring equity in the governance of food systems.

Moreover, the UN's recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment further reinforces this foundation. While not specific to food, the Resolution underscores that environmental degradation and unsustainable development threaten the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly for rural communities whose livelihoods depend on ecosystems. UNDROP's emphasis on the rights to sustainable resource use and protection against displacement aligns with this broader environmental right, strengthening the normative basis for addressing food systems as interconnected with climate, biodiversity, and justice[221].

Limiting corporate interference in policy making is a crucial strategy to ensuring that food systems policies are designed for public benefit rather than corporate gain. This requires addressing CDoH in governance, via the implementation of regulations that prevent conflicts of interest and ensure that policy decisions are transparent and accountable to the public[222]. Strengthening these regulatory frameworks can help counter the undue influence of large corporations within the food system, particularly those that profit from unsustainable or unhealthy practices and products[223]. Such strategy can be operationalised through stricter lobbying laws, mandatory disclosure of corporate spending on lobbying, and the establishment of independent bodies to oversee and review corporate contributions to policy discussions[224]. Finally, supporting civil society to monitor industry capture and counterbalance corporate influence in policy making is crucial.

Redirecting public funds toward community-led, sustainable initiatives is another powerful governance strategy to correct structural inequities in food systems. Unlike market-driven models such as HFFIs, which often rely on private or blended financing and may not inherently prioritise equity, **equity-oriented public investment** can shift resources from harmful industrial, profit-driven models toward approaches that prioritise environmental sustainability, social justice, and local resilience. Initiatives like the WWF's Good Food Finance Network[225] - a multi-stakeholder platform advancing financial mechanisms for sustainable food systems - demonstrate how collaborative actions can complement public funding to align economic incentives with equity. Governments can further support this strategic approach by channelling resources into initiatives led by small-scale producers, cooperatives, and marginalised communities - particularly those historically excluded from decision-making[226].

BOX 4: INTEGRATING EQUITY INTO INTERNATIONAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS

Governance for equitable and sustainable food systems benefits significantly from key **international policy instruments on climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution**, that drive the translation of global commitments into actionable national strategies. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which must raise ambition each 5 years as established by the Paris Agreement, are a key instrument through which countries can include critical food systems actions - from production to consumption and governance - into their climate strategy policy, while simultaneously reaping the co-benefits of enhancing resilience and food security[227]. Similarly, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), developed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), offer essential guidelines for governments to integrate climate adaptation into food systems, promoting resilience against climatic disruptions[228]. Moreover, the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity guide countries toward safeguarding biodiversity essential for resilient food production[229]. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), addresses land degradation and promotes sustainable land management critical for food security and climate resilience[230]. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production), anchors the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP)[231]. The 10YFP serves as the umbrella for initiatives like the Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Programme, promoting resource efficiency, circularity, and equity across food value chains[232]. Food Systems National Pathways, developed by over 100 countries as part of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit follow-up, provide an important framework for national policymakers to articulate their food system transformation strategies[233]. They set targets and incorporate strategies from sustainable farming practices and biodiversity conservation to ecosystem recovery, ensuring food systems operate within planetary boundaries[234, 235]. Integrating clear, measurable equity-related considerations in these targets is fundamental, as they could contribute to addressing power imbalances, reducing structural disparities, and fostering inclusive participation. This way, these policy frameworks could represent powerful entry points for embedding equity-sensitive approaches as a cross-cutting objective. Lastly, in 2024, Member States in the UN Committee for World Food Security (CFS) – which, since its reform in 2009, is the first and only UN committee with inclusive governance allowing participation of civil society and other actors – agreed on a set of "Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition" (see webpage **here;** English version **here**[236]).

Table 7 connects these governance strategies to the frameworks outlined in section 3.2, highlighting key actions and the specific equity dimensions they address.

TABLE 7. GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES, RELATED FRAMEWORKS, KEY ACTIONS AND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

Strategy	Related Frameworks	Approach and Actions	Equity Dimensions
Inclusive decision-making	CSFST, GBVC, EFSRG	Establish participatory platforms; include marginalised groups (women, youth, Indigenous); co-create policies	P, R
Human rights-based approach	RIFSN	Deploy human rights principles; apply obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to food; promote equitable governance and access to adequate nutrition	D, P, R
Limit corporate interference	CDoH, NEF	Regulate lobbying; enforce transparency; support civil society in monitoring and advocacy	P
Redirecting public investment	ASTP, RIFSN, GFPF	Invest in community-led food initiatives; support agroecology and small-scale producers	D, P, R

Having identified key food system domains and strategies to promote equity-sensitive transformation, **the next essential step is understanding how action takes place on the ground**. Real-world applications bring invaluable insights and illustrate the practical viability, complexities, and impacts of these interventions.

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04

FROM VISION TO ACTION:

EQUITY-SENSITIVE STRATEGIES ON THE GROUND

The selection of case studies followed a structured methodology, beginning with an extensive literature review encompassing academic publications, policy reports, and grey literature. A total of 41 potential case studies were evaluated against a set of criteria emphasising equity, health outcomes, environmental sustainability, and the relevance of practices highlighted in the CDoH framework. Geographical diversity, representation of various stakeholders (civil society, private sector, and government), and a balance across implementation scales, from grassroots initiatives to national policies, was ensured.

As a result, **seven case studies were selected, each demonstrating unique implementations of equity-sensitive strategies serving as powerful levers for systemic change across the key domains of food production, consumption, and governance**. These cases illustrate practical approaches, policy successes and structural challenges faced in advancing food systems transformation from an equity lens. By centring interventions that confront systemic power imbalances, these case studies show how more just and sustainable outcomes can be achieved when food systems transformation is approached from social and political standpoint. The selected case studies are:

1. **Reclaiming food sovereignty by the community, for the community: collective mobilisation seeking to transform the Philippines' food system**
2. **Equity-sensitivity in local strategies for sustainable food systems transformation: the case of Victoria, Australia**
3. **Transforming Colombia's food system through fiscal incentives for healthy food and complementary public policies**
4. **Exploring the role of the non-profit sector in advancing systemic equity to reshape the U.S. food system**
5. **Transforming Brazil's food system: equity-sensitive public food procurement for sustainability**
6. **Building cooperative food systems from below: collective consumer action for equity and sustainability in Japan**
7. **Land reform as a foundation for food justice and community sovereignty in Scotland**

These diverse case studies offer critical insights into the enabling factors, practical challenges, and transformative potential of equity-sensitive approaches. **They provide valuable lessons for scaling effective strategies**, that will inform actionable recommendations for stakeholders developed in the last chapter of the report.

4.1 Reclaiming food sovereignty by the community, for the community: collective mobilisation seeking to transform the Philippines' food system

MASIPAG's experience shows that farmer-led approaches rooted in sustainability can contribute to more equitable and resilient food systems. Scaling their impact requires policy frameworks that recognise community innovation, redistribute power, and respond to the realities of communities.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Agroecology delivers multi-dimensional benefits. Diversified, ecological farming practices demonstrably improve climate resilience, food security, nutrition, incomes, and environmental health simultaneously.	**Policy co-optation & dilution.** Transformative approaches risk being stripped of their power through bureaucratic complexity, formalisation, or misalignment with original values. Adoption of isolated elements without addressing underlying power structures or supporting the full package of community strategies risks tokenism and fails to achieve systemic change.
A package of strategies drives systemic change. Combining input sovereignty, agroecology, strengthening of local markets, and inclusive policy and decision making creates synergistic impacts across production, consumption, and governance domains.	**Institutional inertia & conflicts of interest need addressing** National policies often remain biased towards industrial and export models, creating structural resistance. Lack of safeguards (e.g., cooling-off periods between public office and corporate roles) can lead to policies favouring private interests over community needs, undermining grassroots voices.
Procedural equity builds legitimacy and delivers sustainable transformation. Directly involving communities in decision-making across relevant food systems' domains leads to more relevant, trusted, and equitable outcomes.	**Sustainability requires redistributing power.** Lasting equity requires a fundamental redistribution of who controls resources and decision-making power, not just technical solutions or participation mechanisms.

The struggle over rice in the Philippines exemplifies deeper tensions over who holds power in food systems. This case explores how MASIPAG - a grassroots network of farmers, scientists, and NGOs - is reclaiming sovereignty that provides effective alternatives to market-driven, top-down governance.

Rice, the nation's staple crop, is central to Filipino food security and cultural identity. Over time, rice production in the Philippines has come to reflect broader challenges within the national food system, including imbalances in access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making. Since the Green Revolution, both public and private actors have supported high-input, yield-oriented, and export-driven models. While intended to improve productivity and economic growth, these strategies have at times contributed to smallholder debt, ecological stress, and the erosion of traditional knowledge systems, raising important questions about long-term resilience and local food sovereignty.

Policies favouring trade liberalisation, privatisation, and the use of hybrid and GMO seeds have shaped national food production and increased reliance on imports. While

these innovations are often introduced to address hunger and improve yields, they can inadvertently create dependency on proprietary inputs and limit farmers' autonomy. Meanwhile, climate change and limited dietary diversity continue to challenge food security and nutrition, creating challenges especially for small-scale farmers. The rice price hikes, and the Food Security Emergency declared in early 2025 revealed the vulnerabilities of the current system and underscored the importance of more resilient, community-based approaches.

Bringing control back to communities: the MASIPAG model

Founded in 1986, MASIPAG (Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura, standing for Farmers and Scientists for Agricultural Development) aims to restore food sovereignty through farmer-led agroecology. The network empowers over 50,000 smallholders to reclaim control over seeds, agricultural practices, and food systems. MASIPAG promotes farmer-managed seed systems, agroecological techniques, and collaborative innovation. It has recovered and conserved over 700 traditional rice varieties and co-developed more than 2,000 farmer-bred lines, which are shared freely and adapted to local conditions.

MASIPAG also advocates for protecting seed and knowledge as shared community resources, offering alternatives to more restrictive legal and proprietary frameworks. Its grassroots seed systems operate alongside formal legal structures, addressing gaps that can arise when policies do not fully reflect smallholder realities. For example, while the Plant Variety Protection Act passed in 2002 limits seed rights to personal use, MASIPAG farmers maintain vibrant informal systems of exchange that preserve genetic diversity and local adaptability.

To support autonomy and local food economies, MASIPAG introduced a Farmers' Guarantee System (FGS) in 2004, a participatory certification process tailored to short supply chains and local markets. This model reduces barriers for smallholders by replacing expensive third-party systems with a community-based approach involving farmers, consumers, and local actors. However, subsequent government implementation of a parallel Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) introduced more formalised procedures that some smallholders found burdensome. MASIPAG representatives continue to engage with policymakers to ensure that certification remains inclusive and rooted in grassroots values.

Rebalancing power amidst structural resistance

MASIPAG's approach strengthens food security, climate resilience, and the economic and political agency of smallholder farmers. Through agroecological practices such as diversified cropping, farmer-led breeding, and organic soil and water management, farmers in the network report more stable and diverse harvests, reduced reliance on external inputs, and increased resilience to climate-related stressors like erratic rainfall and rising soil salinity. These improvements contribute to enhanced household food security, healthier local diets, and more stable incomes. By eliminating chemical pesticide use, promoting sustainable inputs, and fostering local markets, MASIPAG also reduces the environmental footprint of agriculture in its partner communities.

At the same time, MASIPAG's grassroots organising builds community-level governance capacity and strengthens farmers' collective voice in public debates. The network's experience with developing climate-adapted rice varieties, managing local seed banks, and engaging in community-based certification has provided a practical foundation for its policy advocacy. Working constructively with progressive legislators and institutions, MASIPAG helps

advance farmer-friendly policies while also voicing concerns about regulations or programs that may unintentionally exclude or burden smallholders, bridging grassroots practice with national policy efforts.

Nonetheless, national agricultural policies remain largely oriented toward large-scale, export-focused production, and implementation of reforms can be hindered by bureaucratic complexity and shifting institutional priorities. Although progressive innovations such as participatory certification and seed diversity conservation have been formally recognised, their application has at times fallen short of transformative potential. Additionally, there are currently no regulations in place that establish mandatory cooling-off periods between public service and corporate roles in the Philippines, raising concerns about potential conflicts of interest in policy development, and the meaningful integration of grassroot voices.

Equity in action: the limits of operating within profit-driven systems, and the case for scaling grassroot models

MASIPAG provides a powerful example of how community-led action can drive systemic transformation by addressing entrenched inequities. Its work goes beyond single-issue interventions to activate a package of strategies that reshape food production while influencing consumption patterns and governance structures. These efforts are grounded in grassroots mobilization and coordinated across local, regional, and national levels, showing how systemic transformation requires integrated approaches that work across policy levels and domains.

In terms of the **equity dimensions** investigated in this report, the model advanced by MASIPAG through its actions advances distributive equity by enabling access to seeds and markets for marginalised farmers, while also contributing to a fairer distribution of health outcomes by reducing farmers' and communities' exposure to harmful agrochemicals. Procedural equity is advanced by involving communities directly in certification, research, and policy advocacy. Lastly, recognitional equity by validating traditional knowledge, farmer expertise, and cultural practices long overlooked or devalued by dominant models.

These actions cut across all three food system domains. In production, MASIPAG enables farmers to regain control over agricultural inputs and knowledge systems, reversing decades of top-down, market-oriented, and chemically intensive models. In consumption, it enhances access to nutritious, agroecologically grown food through local markets and community-validated certification. Lastly, in governance, it contests corporate dominance, challenges exclusionary policymaking, and builds space for farmer-led visions of sustainable agriculture.

Yet, the case also reveals the limits of isolated reforms in policy environments shaped by profit-driven logic. Even hard-won legal victories can be watered down by bureaucratic reinterpretation, elite capture, or conflicting regulations. Participatory certification frameworks, once institutionalised, risk being stripped of their transformative potential if not continually defended. MASIPAG's experience underscores that real equity requires shifting the underlying structures of power that govern food systems. This case highlights the importance of coherently packaging legal, institutional, and grassroots strategies to pursue a multi-dimensional, equity-sensitive transformation of food systems. Transformation becomes possible when it is grounded in collective action, linked across scales, and committed to redistributing both material resources and decision-making power.

MASIPAG's action highlights both the opportunities and challenges of scaling agroecological, farmer-led models. With over 50,000 smallholders engaged and a robust network of local seed systems and community-

based certification, it demonstrates meaningful horizontal spread. Yet systemic uptake remains constrained by entrenched, input-intensive policies and market norms. The partial adoption of PGS signals openings, but also the challenges of institutional integration and the risks of co-optation without deeper institutional shifts. To assess transformative scale, clearer metrics are needed, tracking not only reach but also influence on policy, market dynamics, and farmer resilience. More broadly, models like MASIPAG signal the potential of farmer-led, climate-resilient, and community-rooted approaches to drive agricultural transformation. Realising this potential at scale will require aligned policy frameworks, cross-sector partnerships, and sustained commitment to embedding agroecology, equity, and farmer agency at the heart of food system transitions.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Enables farmers to regain access to diverse, locally adapted seeds and promotes farmer-led agroecology to reduce dependence on costly external inputs, increasing food security, resilience, and autonomy, while also contributing to improved health outcomes by minimising exposure to harmful agrochemicals.	Enables direct farmer participation in seed selection, breeding, and agroecological research, preserving control over production decisions and ensuring practices align with local needs, contexts, and priorities.	Affirms and revitalises traditional knowledge systems, Indigenous practices, and farmer expertise long devalued by industrial models of agriculture.
Consumption	Improves access to nutritious, pesticide-free food through local markets and farmer-verified production systems (e.g., Farmers' Guarantee System), promoting affordability and local supply chains.	Operationalises the Farmers' Guarantee System (FGS), a participatory certification model that empowers farmers, consumers, and communities to define and validate standards, without relying on costly third-party systems or falling back into exclusionary practices.	Promotes food systems that respect cultural preferences and knowledge, preserving culinary traditions and reinforcing food sovereignty.
Governance	Advocates for redistribution of power in food policy by challenging corporate-aligned policies and advocating for community-led seed systems, agroecology, and inclusive food regulation.	Supports grassroots-led legal action and multi-scalar organising to hold government and corporations accountable, allowing communities to influence policy through both institutional engagement and movement-building.	Challenges regulatory models that marginalise informal farmer practices; legitimise community seed systems and elevates farmer voices in national agricultural discourse.

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4.2 Equity-sensitivity in local strategies for sustainable food systems transformation: the case of Victoria, Australia

Victorian local governments are placing equity at the heart of food system strategies by promoting inclusive planning, supporting small-scale producers, and fostering relocalised food economies. These initiatives hold significant promise for driving sustainable transformation. However, structural barriers and entrenched systems continue to constrain their full potential. With stronger policy backing and comprehensive systemic reform, local efforts can become powerful drivers of enduring, equity-focused change.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Localised governance enhances responsiveness. Local governments' proximity enables targeted, community-informed strategies that address specific equity and sustainability issues effectively.	**Profit-centric approaches risk reproducing inequities. Structural limitations remain entrenched.** Relying predominantly on market mechanisms can perpetuate existing inequalities if not accompanied by robust redistributive measures. Without systemic policy backing at higher governance levels, local efforts risk being constrained by entrenched economic structures and power dynamics.
Equity-sensitive planning fosters inclusive and relevant transformation. Embedding equity explicitly in strategies through distributive, procedural, and recognitional approaches can guide more holistic and inclusive reforms. Engaging communities directly in planning through meaningful participatory processes ensures solutions are culturally relevant, trusted, and responsive to actual community needs.	**Procedural engagement without redistributive power is limited. Incomplete operationalisation risks tokenism.** Community participation must translate into tangible influence over resource allocation and policy decisions to ensure meaningful equity outcomes. Without clearly operationalised equity metrics and actions, participatory strategies may become symbolic rather than transformative.
Horizontal scalability enhances broader systemic influence. Successful local models can inspire and guide similar communities facing comparable socioeconomic and geographic contexts.	**Vertical scalability faces systemic inertia.** Without clear strategies for engaging higher-level policy reforms and confronting structural inequities, local successes may fail to catalyse broader systemic transformation.

Victoria, a southeastern Australian state home to Melbourne and expansive rural regions, offers an insightful entry into the country's broader food system challenges, and an illustrative example of how local governments are stepping in to address them. Despite Australia's high-income status, the risk of experiencing hunger is rising across households in Victoria, disproportionately affecting low-income households, older residents, Indigenous communities, and those living in rural or peri-urban areas. This unequal distribution of risk has deep roots in structural inequities and has been magnified by recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted food supply chains and increased the cost of essential goods.

Poor nutrition remains a persistent driver of preventable disease across Victoria. Many areas, especially those facing socioeconomic disadvantage, report low intake of fruits and vegetables and rising consumption of UPFs. These patterns are reinforced by a food environment heavily shaped by income status and transport access. Market concentration and the dominance of industrial agriculture have also exposed the fragility of food supply chains and created additional barriers for small-scale producers and vulnerable consumers. Meanwhile, systemic risks - such as increasing land-use pressure from both housing development and intensive agriculture, and the accelerating climate crisis - further compound local inequities.

In this context, local governments across Victoria have emerged as key actors in food systems transformation. Despite legislative and financial constraints, their proximity to communities allows them to respond in more targeted and participatory ways. Across the state, councils are recognising the need for a whole-system approach to food systems that integrates an equity-sensitive approach as core tenet to ensuring resilience and sustainability. Two councils, Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula Shire, stand out for their efforts to craft locally rooted, equity-sensitive strategies that aim to reshape food systems.

Local government leadership in action: Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula Shires

Cardinia Shire has emerged as a leader in this space through the development and implementation of its Community Food Strategy (2018–2026). Informed by local needs and aligned with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the strategy positions food as a means to promote community health, social justice, and environmental resilience. It integrates lived experience and cross-sector collaboration to deliver a community-led roadmap for food systems transformation. The process of developing the strategy was deeply participatory, involving over 500 residents through Kitchen Table Conversations which helped identify key priorities - including increasing access to affordable, nutritious food; supporting local producers; reducing food waste; and building community knowledge and skills around food.

Further south, Mornington Peninsula Shire has taken a complementary approach that reflects its unique peri-urban geography and agricultural heritage. Its Food Economy and Agroecology Strategy (2022–2028) was developed in response to escalating environmental, economic, and social challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and the fragility of centralised food supply chains. The strategy reflects a shift from viewing agriculture solely as an economic sector to recognising its role in supporting environmental health, cultural identity, and community wellbeing. The Mornington Peninsula's "green wedge" zoning, which protects certain areas from urban development, has played a key role in shaping this vision in a way that also ensures that action is taken to preserve equitable and sustainable land use.

However, ongoing challenges such as rising land values, speculative development pressure, and fragmented land holdings continue to pose challenges to the viability of smallholder farming. The Mornington Peninsula strategy emphasises the relocalisation of food systems, regenerative agriculture, and the integration of ecological science with economic development. It promotes farmer engagement through discussion groups and field days, and supports initiatives such as the Mornington Peninsula Produce provenance brand to raise the profile of locally grown food. Efforts to promote social equity, one of the core tenets of the strategy, are gradually taking shape. One notable initiative is the Future Farmers Pathway Program, which aims to support young people without intergenerational ties to farming by providing land access, hands-on training, and connections to local networks. In addition, the Shire has cautiously begun to engage with Aboriginal communities to integrate Indigenous land management practices into local agroecological approaches.

Equity relevance and challenges

Both Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula have started to confront systemic barriers to more equitable food systems.

In Cardinia, the strategy explicitly embeds equity as a core objective: distributive equity is addressed through actions that promote food affordability and accessibility, including support for community grocers and innovative distribution models. An ambition to deliver on procedural equity is reflected in the strategy's commitment to participatory planning and decision-making processes, which mobilise residents as co-creators of policy and practice. While these processes mark an important shift toward more inclusive governance, their impact has yet to be systematically evaluated, and it remains to be seen how community input translates into regulation, budgeting, or institutional change. At the same time, the strategy falls short of operationalising recognitional equity. Nonetheless, the Shire has laid important groundwork for food system transformation. To fully realise the strategy's potential, greater effort is needed to fully operationalise equity within the local remit - in particular, ensuring that communities' resources and influence on decision-making are strengthened. Yet even the most committed local action cannot, on its own, address the structural forces that shape food systems. Support and alignment from higher levels of governance will be necessary to confront issues such as land concentration, corporate market dominance, and precarious labour conditions. For strategies like Cardinia's to deliver lasting, systemic change, they must be met with enabling national policies that confront these deeper drivers and redistribute power across different levels of the food system.

Mornington Peninsula's strategy foregrounds environmental sustainability and local food economies, and begins to recognise the social and cultural dimensions of food systems. From an equity standpoint, distributive equity is partially pursued through support for small-scale producers and efforts to redistribute economic benefits via branding, training, and direct market access. Procedural equity is built into the strategy's development process, which included extensive community consultation, and continues through governance mechanisms such as the Sustainable Food Economy and Regenerative Agriculture Taskforce. Applications of recognitional equity are evident in the strategy's emphasis on understanding and supporting the needs of next-generation farmers. Nonetheless, the strategy remains bound by its location within the Economic Development portfolio, which creates ongoing tensions between market competitiveness and deeper equity or health goals. While it articulates a strong ecological vision, it leans heavily on market-based tools, such as certification schemes and localised branding, that risk reproducing

existing inequities if not paired with stronger redistributive mechanisms. Structural barriers, including rising land values, fragmented ownership, and speculative development, are acknowledged but not fundamentally challenged. As a result, Mornington's emphasis on agroecological transformation and intergenerational equity, though important, remains vulnerable to being co-opted by dominant economic and ownership logics. Without a more practical approach to advancing social justice as a core component of food system transformation, the strategy's potential to drive truly transformative change remains limited.

Both Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula represent promising examples of local governments interested in moving toward more just and sustainable food systems. Each acknowledges the importance of equity and takes initial steps to embed it within strategy development and implementation. Yet despite these intentions, both remain constrained by deeper systemic forces. In Mornington for instance, challenges remain around meaningful and sustained inclusion of Indigenous voices, while attempts at cooperative land-sharing have revealed the complexities of redistributing land access equitably in a context dominated by private ownership and speculation, with structural power imbalances between landowners and aspiring producers. More broadly, both strategies remain tethered to dominant paradigms: economic development priorities, market-oriented solutions, and governance structures that risk furthering a concentration of decision-making power in the hands of dominant groups. While the foundations for procedural equity have been laid, distributive and recognitional equity are uneven and insufficiently resourced. Crucially, neither strategy fully engages with CDoH, nor do they confront the structural drivers that entrench inequality and unsustainability, such as commodification of natural resources, corporate concentration, and food systems' financialisation.

At the same time, these cases offer valuable insights into the conditions and approaches that can support transformational change. Both strategies demonstrate promising horizontal scalability, particularly in contexts with similar socio-geographic features. While both strategies articulate systemic ambitions, vertical scaling remains largely aspirational, with limited evidence, so far, of influence on higher-level policy or institutional frameworks. Strengthening evaluative systems and tracing institutional uptake will be critical to realising and demonstrating broader systemic impact. These case studies underscore a core challenge: while local governments have the proximity and legitimacy to play a key role in food systems transformation, and are beginning to explicitly position equity as a core goal in food system strategies, unlocking their full transformative potential will require a deeper rethinking of the political-economic model in which local food systems are embedded.

Food system domains / equity dimensions	Distributive equity	Procedural equity	Recognitional equity
Production	Focuses on community-based support for local food production (Cardinia) Supports small-scale producers through branding, training, and local market access; land access for aspiring farmers via Future Farmers Pathway program (Mornington)	Inclusion of communities in strategy design and governance bodies (Cardinia) Farmer input into certification models, land use plans, and participation in mentoring/training structures (Mornington)	Values Indigenous land management and smallholder roles (limited integration of tailored interventions so far); highlights and works to meet the needs of young, non-inheriting farmers (Mornington)
Consumption	Aims to increase access to affordable, healthy food in low-income areas via community grocers (Cardinia) Emphasises access to regionally grown food through localised supply chains and educational outreach. (Mornington)	Residents engaged to co-design food access initiatives. (Cardinia) Includes community voices in designing programs targeting local food security challenges. (Mornington)	Builds awareness of social and dietary diversity in regional food access strategies, but no actions were reported on translating this awareness into practice. (Mornington)
Governance	Embeds equity in strategy goals to ensure policies benefit vulnerable communities (Cardinia) Balances economic, environmental, and social goals through strategic integration within local government planning. (Mornington)	Strategy developed using participatory governance mechanisms. (Cardinia) Begins integrating Indigenous stewardship and rural equity into governance frameworks (Mornington)	

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4.3 Transforming Colombia's food system through fiscal incentives for healthy food and complementary public policies

Colombia's recent food policy and fiscal reforms, supported by strong civil society coalitions, show how equity-sensitive tools like UPF taxes, food labelling, constitutional reforms and public procurement, can challenge structural disparities in food systems. While these reforms face resistance from powerful industry actors, they demonstrate how coordinated, rights-based action can begin to realign food governance with public health, sustainability, and social justice.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Fiscal and labelling tools can shift consumer behaviours effectively. Taxes on unhealthy products and sugary beverages provide tangible incentives for healthier choices, improving public health and nutrition equity. Clear, science-based labelling systems help inform healthier choices, aligning with public health goals and consumer rights.	**Regulatory capture and industry resistance can hamper transformation.** Early adoption of industry-friendly or misleading labelling can weaken consumer trust and delay meaningful reform. Powerful corporate lobbying, legal challenges, and misleading claims can dilute or obstruct policies, requiring strong political will, advocacy, and evidence-based counterstrategies.
Constitutional reforms anchor food rights. Recognising food as a fundamental right strengthens the legal basis for equitable, sustainable food governance and reinforces government accountability.	**Incomplete implementation risks heightening inequity.** Limited data, territorial disparities, and entrenched market dynamics can hinder effective implementation of transformative reforms. Without comprehensive territorial implementation and monitoring, policies may unevenly benefit marginalised groups, undermining intended outcomes.
Robust civil society coalitions drive systemic change. Coordinated advocacy, combining legal, academic, and community approaches, strengthens accountability and advances equity-sensitive food policies.	**Symbolic reforms without operational follow-through.** Constitutional recognition alone risks remaining symbolic unless actively operationalised through specific laws, dedicated resources, and clear accountability frameworks.

Colombia's food system is deeply intertwined with global economic pressures and local socio-political challenges, shaped by structural disparities and global market dynamics. Since the 1980s, a shift towards agro-exports has deepened the country's dependence on global commercial agendas, eroding food sovereignty and marginalising local food systems. This shift has reshaped agricultural priorities and reinforced structural inequities, with patterns of land use increasingly driven by power asymmetries linked to conflict, dispossession, and agrarian concentration. The dominance of high-value crops like coffee, bananas, and sugar cane has fuelled land concentration, displacing small-scale farmers and undermining local food production. In parallel, large-scale livestock production has accelerated deforestation and expanded over land formerly held by local and Indigenous communities. Government incentives favouring monocultures, tied to agro-industrial supply chains rather than local food and social needs, further entrench rural disempowerment and weaken food and territorial sovereignty. These dynamics have eroded domestic food production capacity, leaving Colombia increasingly reliant on imported foods, and widening nutritional and social disparities.

Micronutrient deficiencies and food insecurity affect nearly one-third of Colombians, with marginalised communities disproportionately impacted. The consumption of UPFs is rising, driven by policies that fail to regulate aggressive advertising, and enable pricing structures that make UPFs more affordable than whole foods.

This reality contributes to the high prevalence of NCDs and to significant environmental harms. Currently, UPF consumption in Colombia is predominantly concentrated among adolescents and urban residents, raising alarms about intergenerational health equity. However, global consumption patterns reveal a concerning trend: initially consumed by wealthier and younger groups, over time, UPF consumption tends to become increasingly prevalent among lower-income populations. This pattern is now gradually unfolding in Colombia, where the growing accessibility of UPFs, amid rising costs of whole foods, threatens to deepen existing health disparities, making chronic disease risks even graver for the most vulnerable.

Civil society advocacy and public policy responses to shape equitable food systems

Colombian civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly Dejusticia and its allied coalition, have played a critical role in reshaping food policy, merging rigorous legal, academic, and advocacy strategies with community-based action. CSOs have been at the forefront of advocating for transformative public and food policy reforms, securing key legislative advancements aimed at addressing inequities in food systems. These efforts have been crucial in protecting the population from the harms of a corporate-controlled food system, challenging the dominance of industrial food production, and promoting policies that prioritise equity as a way to protect public health, food sovereignty, ecosystems and natural resources. However, these policies have faced substantial resistance from powerful industry stakeholders seeking to maintain their influence.

One of the earliest and most emblematic examples is the public food procurement policy introduced in 2021. Inspired by Brazil's model (see Case Study 5), it aims to support local, small-scale food producers by mandating that 30% of government food purchases come from them. While the legal framework is in place, translating this policy into tangible results remains a challenge. Civil society actors point to limited disaggregated data on smallholder producers and uneven implementation across territories as key barriers. CSOs continue to push for rigorous enforcement and equitable territorial roll-out, ensuring the policy benefits marginalised rural producers as intended.

Another significant milestone was the introduction of mandatory front-of-package labelling regulation for UPFs. Initially introduced in 2021 via the Resolution 810, this earlier version of the labelling system faced criticism for its close alignment with industry interests. The first iteration of the labels, featuring circular symbols, were widely deemed misleading by civil society groups, who argued that they lacked scientific rigor and failed to convey meaningful health information. Advocacy efforts led to a landmark legal challenge. Although the court did not reach a final ruling, civil society pressure, supported by the concept of "evidence free of conflict of interest," prompted the government to issue stronger regulations in 2022 through the Resolution 2492. This amendment replaced the circular labels with black octagonal warning labels, aligning Colombia's labelling system with regional best practices and the Pan American Health Organization's nutrient profile model, marking a significant victory for consumer protection and public health advocacy.

In 2022, Colombia introduced a progressive "healthy" tax on UPFs and sugary beverages aimed at curbing consumption of unhealthy products, which came into effect in November 2023. This tax is not primarily designed to generate revenue but to shift consumer behaviour. CSOs played a key role in shaping this tax, providing reliable data on the economic and health benefits of reducing UPFs consumption. The tax gained traction in part because the food industry redirected its lobbying efforts toward a concurrent income tax reform, which corporations viewed as more

economically threatening, diluting their capacity to fully oppose this measure. Nonetheless, the "healthy" tax faced lobbying all throughout the development and implementation process. One of the main initial arguments put forward by the industry was that the tax would cause job losses and worsen affordability for low-income groups. However, these claims were swiftly debunked by research from CSOs, which countered with real-time price and employment data showing minimal job impact and that price increases were mainly due to corporate pricing, not the tax itself. During implementation, the industry continued to lobby for more lenient tax categories, claiming for instance that the tax harmed dairy affordability. Civil society groups debunked this narrative too, presenting evidence that showed large corporations producing and selling ultra processed dairy were paying small-scale milk producers less, while keeping retail prices high. This evidence-based rebuttal shifted public discourse and safeguarded policy integrity. In the face of legal challenges, the Constitutional Court upheld the tax in a landmark ruling, affirming it as a legitimate public health measure. Since the tax was introduced, there has been a noticeable market shift: prices for ultra-processed dairy products have increased, while prices for healthier dairy options, such as fresh milk and butter, have remained stable. By November 2024, the tax had generated 280 million pesos. However, under Colombian law, this revenue is not earmarked for specific spending, prompting civil society to advocate that the revenue be channelled, at least politically, towards health and food security programs.

Lastly, in a historic move in 2023, Colombia passed a constitutional reform recognising food as a fundamental right and obligating the government to ensure food access for all citizens. CSOs as Dejusticia and FIAN Colombia played a central role in advocating for this reform, framing it as a legal obligation rooted in interlinked rights to health, culture, and fiscal justice.

Food system reforms in Colombia through an equity lens

The reforms and initiatives discussed in this case study are part of Colombia's broader effort to promote food access and food sovereignty, address NCDs, and reduce the environmental harms of industrial agriculture. They represent a significant step toward reorienting the food system around equity, sustainability, and public interest, centring justice and democratic accountability. These policies are designed to address immediate public health concerns but have also challenged the CDoH that perpetuate structural inequities in food production, consumption, and governance. Colombia's experience illustrates how equity-sensitive public policies can begin to dismantle the entrenched power asymmetries that have long shaped its food landscape.

Distributive equity is reflected in policies like the public food procurement law and the progressive tax on UPFs, which aim to improve access to nutritious food for lower-income communities, and could achieve even greater benefits if economic benefits were redirected to support small-scale producers and/or public health programs. Procedural equity, while not legally enshrined, is visible in the ways civil society has shaped policy design and implementation, driving legal challenges against corporate influence, demanding transparent governance, and advocating for inclusive participation in defining the right to food. Recognitional equity has guided efforts to ensure culturally appropriate, nutritious food is not only available but guaranteed, and that food policies are adapted to Colombia's territorial, social, and cultural diversity.

Reforms have faced intense resistance from powerful agribusiness and food industry actors. Misinformation campaigns, legal challenges, and political lobbying, often disguised in "technical" language, have been used to

dilute or block reforms. Civil society has been central in countering these efforts, particularly around the "healthy" food tax, which has already shown promising outcomes. Ongoing civil society monitoring continues to track the effects of the tax on access to local food, monitoring substitution patterns and pushing for complementary policies, such as subsidies for fresh produce and improved food access through short supply chains.

This case study demonstrates how equity-sensitive action relevant to the dimensions of food consumption and governance - and to a lesser-observable extent, food production - can contribute to shift food systems toward justice, resilience, and sustainability. On the consumption side, fiscal and regulatory tools such as the UPF tax and front-of-package labelling directly confront the CDoH, reshaping food environments and targeting health disparities. In terms of governance, civil society's legal, policy, and monitoring efforts have linked these policies into a coherent, equity-oriented agenda. Though originally pursued as separate reforms, they have been advanced as a strategic policy package to challenge entrenched power and uphold public interest. While deeper transformation in production remains constrained by structural barriers and incentive systems favouring industrial agriculture, entry points like the public procurement law suggest pathways for redirecting support toward small-scale, environmentally-sustainable producers.

Colombia's experience affirms that equity-centred policy reform, particularly when supported by strong civil society coalitions, can open pathways to systemic change, even within contexts marked by structural resistance and concentrated power. The systemic orientation of Colombia's reforms, anchored in fiscal tools, public procurement, and constitutional change, positions them as credible models for embedding equity in food systems transformation at scale. Their design aligns with global health and sustainability agendas, while their implementation provides lessons in navigating entrenched power structures through evidence-based, equity-driven advocacy. Realising their full scaling potential will depend on continued political will, strengthened monitoring, territorial adaptation, and sustained support for local implementation.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Public procurement law mandates 30% of government food purchases come from small-scale farmers, redistributing economic opportunities and resources toward marginalised rural and producers.	Civil society organizations advocate for transparent implementation, improved monitoring, and disaggregated data collection to ensure small-scale producers are not excluded in practice.	Ongoing advocacy aims to recognise the traditional knowledge, agroecological practices, and cultural contributions of small-scale, Indigenous, and agroecological producers in shaping future food policy.
Consumption	Progressive tax on UPFs and improved front-of-package labelling aim to make nutritious food more affordable and accessible, especially for low-income communities vulnerable to diet-related diseases, and reduce consumption disparities.	CSOs led legal and public advocacy efforts to strengthen labelling regulations, defend the healthy tax from industry lobbying, and ensure transparency and accountability in policymaking.	Mandatory labelling and fiscal policy measures acknowledge the heightened health risks among marginalised populations, particularly youth, urban residents, and low-income groups, tailoring interventions to address these vulnerabilities.
Governance	Constitutional recognition of the right to food and targeted public spending mechanisms reflect a shift toward state accountability in redistributing resources to promote food justice and equity.	Policy co-creation and implementation have been driven by civil society coalitions through strategic litigation, sustained monitoring, and broad-based advocacy, strengthening public participation and democratic governance.	The constitutional recognition of food as a fundamental right embeds principles of cultural appropriateness, nutritional adequacy, and territorial diversity, acknowledging diverse communities as active participants in shaping equitable food systems.

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4.4 Exploring the role of the non-profit sector in advancing systemic equity to reshape the U.S. food system

Disparities continue to undermine access to healthy food and economic opportunities in the U.S. Yet federal programs, when aligned with community-led innovations from nonprofits like Fair Food Network, show how equity-sensitive strategies can expand food access and economic inclusion, by doubling access to nutritious food for low-income families and supporting localised food economies. Nonetheless, challenges like underfunding and environmental gaps persist.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Cross-sector partnerships expand systemic transformation. Strategic collaboration across governmental, philanthropic, and community sectors enables comprehensive solutions addressing interlinked inequities in food consumption, production, and governance.	**Trade-offs between reach and local economic impact need addressing.** Expanding incentive programs through large retailers increases access but may reduce benefits for small-scale producers and local economies, requiring careful management to maintain equity objectives.
Nutrition incentives can drive multiple equity outcomes. Initiatives linking food access improvements for low-income communities to economic support for local farmers can effectively address multiple systemic inequities simultaneously.	**Persistent market structures limit systemic equity.** Deeply embedded market norms, including market consolidation and exclusionary finance systems, can undermine equitable transformation if broader structural reforms are not concurrently pursued.
Equity-focused framing builds broad political support. Emphasising both consumer health and economic inclusion can attract diverse stakeholder support, including bipartisan political backing, essential for program sustainability and scaling.	**Limited engagement with environmental justice constrains systemic transformation.** Failing to integrate environmental sustainability with equity objectives may overlook critical opportunities to address interconnected environmental and social inequities, weakening long-term resilience.

Despite being a global powerhouse in food production, the United States (U.S.) grapples with persistent inequities in its food system. Millions of Americans experience food insecurity due to systemic challenges in how food is produced, distributed, and accessed. The paradox of abundance coexisting with deprivation stems from a system historically structured around industrial-scale agriculture and policy choices that have prioritised commodity crop production over local nutritional needs. Corn and soybeans dominate U.S. farmland, leading to degraded soils, diminished crop diversity, and increased dependence on imported fruits and vegetables to meet domestic nutritional needs.

Food insecurity in the U.S. cannot be fully understood without confronting two interrelated drivers: the enduring legacy of structural racism, and the concentration of power across the food economy. Historical and racialised patterns of exclusion have created what scholars and activists describe as “food apartheid”, conditions in which predominantly low-income and Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities face systematically limited access to affordable, nutritious food. In 2023, 13.5% of U.S. households, which translated to around 18 million people, experienced food insecurity, up from the previous year’s 12.8% - with households with children and immigrant populations disproportionately affected. Retail geography further reinforces this divide: food deserts disproportionately affect rural areas, low-income urban regions, and racialised communities. This challenging food environment contributes to the concentration of diet-related NCDs among low-income and racialised populations. At the same time, corporate consolidation in the food system, from agribusiness to processing, distribution,

and retail, limits options for consumers, drives down income for small producers, and pressures policy to prioritise market logics over wellbeing. Regulatory gaps in areas such as antitrust enforcement and fair pricing have enabled this consolidation to persist largely unchecked.

Amid these systemic challenges, momentum for change is growing with grassroots initiatives, policy advocacy, and local government programs working to build a more just and resilient food system. At federal level, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a central role. In 2023, SNAP supported roughly 42 million low-income individuals each month, with a budget of $112.8 billion, providing essential access to food through monthly benefits redeemable at participating retailers. As the country's largest federal nutrition assistance program, SNAP is a vital safety net and a key mechanism for advancing equity, supporting household food security, improving dietary outcomes, and offering a potential platform for more localised, health-oriented food economies.

The role of non-profit organisations in advancing system-level interventions

To address both hunger and nutritional inequities, several targeted federal programmes have emerged. Among these, the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), authorised by the 2018 Farm Bill, supports projects that promote fruit and vegetable consumption among low-income individuals nationwide, offering financial incentives at the point of purchase. Central to GusNIP's mission is the provision of Nutrition Incentive Grants, which target SNAP participants - low-income consumers who are eligible to receive federal nutrition assistance - to reduce the risk of experiencing hunger and improve dietary outcomes.

From 2019 to 2024, GusNIP has provided over $330 million in funding to over 250 projects throughout the U.S. These grants require cross-sector collaboration across food systems and social healthcare actors, particularly in underserved areas. Moreover, accessing GusNIP funding and implementing related initiatives remains complex and requires applicants to secure a dollar-for-dollar match from non-federal sources, making private or local investment a critical first step. In this context, non-profit organisations have played a critical role in mobilising stakeholders across sectors to finance, design, scale, and support implementation. Their involvement has been key to ensuring that interventions move beyond traditional silos and work simultaneously to address the multiple, overlapping inequities that prevent sustainable transformation in food systems, connecting dots between policy, practice, and community needs.

A leading example is Fair Food Network's (FFN) Double Up Food Bucks program. Launched in 2009 in five Detroit farmers markets, it has since grown into a national model for fruit and vegetable incentives. In Michigan alone, it now operates more than 230 participating farmers markets, grocery and corner stores, and has currently been adopted in over 30 states, with the contribution and coordination of an array of non-profit actors, academic partners, and philanthropic institutions. Double Up provides the necessary dollar-for-dollar match when SNAP participants purchase fresh produce, effectively doubling their buying power for fruit and vegetables. While the implementation of the model varies across states, the core component of this model emphasises support for locally grown produce, promoting direct-to-consumer sales through community-supported agriculture, farmers' and mobile markets. This approach generates dual benefits: improving access to healthy food for low-income households while creating new market opportunities for small and mid-scale farmers. The success of Double Up helped institutionalise support for nutrition incentives in subsequent Farm Bills and demonstrated the scalability of non-

profit-led innovations in implementing federal programming.

In addition to program delivery, non-profit organisations like FFN have also been central in strengthening the technical infrastructure required for implementation. The Network co-leads the Nutrition Incentive Hub, a national technical assistance centre that supports GusNIP program implementers across all 50 U.S. states. The Hub provides standardised evaluation tools, technical guidance, and serves as an intermediary with U.S. Department of Agriculture, helping implementers navigate complex regulatory environments. Beyond their work on nutritional incentives, FFN runs mission-aligned financing programmes like the Fair Food Fund that provide grants, loans, and technical support to food entrepreneurs historically excluded and marginalised in dominant capital markets, expanding market participation, and building local food infrastructure. Additionally, FFN has embedded community decision-making into its financing work, with funding allocations in some cases guided by diverse local representatives beyond the organization's staff. This participatory model ensures investments are responsive to community needs and values.

Embedding equity in public and private investments to redesign U.S. food systems

Federal programs like GusNIP are essential tools for addressing inequities in the U.S. food system. However, without strong cross-sector partnerships and better policy integration, they risk reinforcing fragmented, siloed responses. Their effectiveness risks being limited by the complexity of means-tested designs, characterised by high eligibility thresholds, administrative burdens, and fragmented delivery, which can discourage participation, increase costs, and perpetuate stigma among receivers. Strengthening coordination, simplifying access, and embedding equity not only in outcomes but also in program design and delivery could help unlock the full potential of these efforts. With the right partnerships and policy alignment, programs like GusNIP can move beyond mitigation and become catalysts for more systemic transformation.

Non-profit organisations play a critical role in aligning these programs with broader equity goals, recognising that hunger and malnutrition are not isolated issues but symptoms of deeper structural imbalances like market concentration, unequal access to capital, and the political and economic marginalisation of historically excluded communities.

With a dual focus on food access and economic inclusion, organisations like FFN advance an equity-sensitive model that responds to historic and structural exclusion and that operates at the intersection of food consumption, production, and governance. The dual-benefit framing of FFN's initiatives has been instrumental in building bipartisan political support and in rallying the participation of several stakeholders, from anti-poverty to farm and health advocacy groups, in an otherwise polarised policy environment. However, the need to balance these dual objectives also presents challenges.

This design reflects a core distributive equity goal: ensuring that federal investments bring equitable benefits to consumers, local producers and independent retailers. Early iterations of the program only focused on farmers markets and small-scale outlets to redirect consumer spending toward local economies and more sustainable supply chains. As the program has scaled, some states have expanded implementation through large national retailers to increase reach, particularly in underserved areas with limited retail options. While this has improved food access, it often comes at the cost of reduced economic benefit for smallholder farmers and local retailers. FFN actively manages these trade-offs, by shifting away from large chains where feasible, and reinvesting in smaller actors to align

reach with values - prioritising local impact while navigating the realities of a fragmented policy and food environment.

FFN's investment initiatives further challenge systemic exclusion by supporting food entrepreneurs who are typically overlooked by mainstream lenders, with relevance to both the domain of food production and consumption. Funding decisions are guided by a rubric that incorporates ethnic, geographic, and social criteria, and are shaped through participatory processes that include community representatives. This embeds procedural equity into financing decisions while advancing recognitional equity by valuing the knowledge and contributions of local food actors. From a governance perspective, FFN plays a critical intermediary role through the Nutrition Incentive Hub, providing technical support to implementers across the country. The Hub helps navigate regulatory complexity and buffers grassroots groups from federal rigidity, allowing adaptive problem-solving without penalising innovation.

Yet, systemic challenges persist. Federal nutrition programs remain underfunded, constrained by match requirements, and uneven in eligibility coverage. Broader issues like agribusiness consolidation and exclusionary finance systems reinforce power imbalances. While FFN addresses multiple layers of inequity and has advanced equity in food access and financing, its engagement with environmental justice and the disproportionate impacts of environmental harm related to food systems on marginalised communities remains limited. Integrating environmentally sustainable practices across production, retail, and consumption could strengthen alignment with planetary health goals. This applies not only to FFN's own programs, but also to broader federal initiatives like GusNIP, which could more fully integrate environmental considerations into their initiatives operating across nutrition and agricultural goals.

Finally, while equity-driven, FFN operates within a broader policy landscape shaped by profit-driven market logics that treat food as a commodity. These paradigms are difficult to challenge, particularly within a context marked by a fragmented welfare system, weak labour protections, and limited social safety nets. The absence of universal health coverage, minimal cash transfer programs, and uneven minimum wage regulations compound food insecurity and restrict the reach of equity-focused interventions. Engaging more directly with these systemic conditions and the narratives that sustain them could help shift dominant frameworks and open space for innovative models grounded in the right to food, collective and planetary well-being. Despite limitations, it is evident that civil society actors can complement and push public initiatives toward greater inclusivity and resilience, operationalising equity-sensitive strategies across a highly complex food system, and charting a path for food systems transformation that is grounded in a fairer distribution of benefits and opportunities.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Investment initiatives channel investment to historically marginalised food entrepreneurs and small-scale producers, expanding access to capital and market opportunities.	Funding decisions under the Fair Food Fund incorporate participatory input and use ethnic, geographic, and social criteria to guide allocations.	Supports food entrepreneurs and producers historically excluded from mainstream finance, valuing local knowledge, context, and lived experience in investment decisions, acknowledging their exclusion and tailoring support to their contexts.
Consumption	Nutrition incentives increase healthy food access for SNAP recipients improving affordability in underserved communities while increasing market opportunities for small and local retailers.	Community voices are integrated into program design and implementation, with program design considering varied retail realities in underserved areas (e.g. mobile markets vs. large chains), balancing reach with community needs.	Nutrition incentive programs acknowledge and address structural inequities in food access by targeting resources to racialised and low-income communities.
Governance	Non-profits help redirect public funds and program design to include underserved regions and actors often excluded from mainstream food and health policy benefits.	Technical assistance facilitates community-responsive governance, enabling local implementers, often small, under-resourced nonprofits, to participate in and shape program delivery.	Centres marginalised actors in food policy discussions, acknowledging systemic barriers and enabling localised, context-sensitive solutions through civil society mediation.

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4.5 Transforming Brazil's food system: equity-sensitive public food procurement for sustainability

Brazil's experience shows how equity-sensitive public food procurement can transform food systems, supporting traditional producers, improving access to nutritious, culturally relevant food, and embedding marginalised voices in governance. While barriers remain, initiatives like PNAE and Catrapovos demonstrate how targeted policies, participatory platforms, and legal innovation can drive inclusion and sustainability within a system still shaped by power and market concentration.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Equity-sensitive public procurement can deliver meaningful food systems' transformation. Strategically directing public procurement toward smallholders and traditional producers advances local market inclusion, food sovereignty, and nutritional equity simultaneously.	**Implementation variability and policy misalignment limit outcomes.** Without addressing bureaucratic hurdles, infrastructure gaps, and inconsistent municipal compliance, procurement policies risk uneven benefits and persistent exclusion. Persistent prioritisation of export-oriented industrial agriculture undermines equity-sensitive public procurement, risking incoherence and weakening long-term environmental and social resilience.
Participatory governance strengthens systemic equity. Inclusive, participatory platforms embed marginalised voices into decision making, fostering equitable governance and ensuring policy relevance to diverse communities.	**Institutional inertia undermines participatory gains.** Bureaucratic complexity and resistance from established actors may impede the implementation of participatory decisions, diluting their intended transformative effects.
Validation of traditional foods and food pathways reinforces recognitional equity. Integrating culturally appropriate, traditional foods into public procurement programmes validates traditional and local knowledge, promoting dietary diversity and cultural inclusion.	**Complex certification creates barriers.** Without simplified regulatory frameworks, stringent sanitary and certification standards disproportionately disadvantage traditional producers, limiting their meaningful participation.

Brazil's food system is shaped by a complex interplay of global market dynamics, domestic drivers, and longstanding inequities. As a leading exporter of soybeans and beef, Brazil has embraced an agro-industrial model that, while economically significant, has contributed to land concentration, ecosystem degradation, and the marginalisation of small-scale farmers and Indigenous communities. Despite constitutional guarantees of the right to food, decades of policy emphasis on large-scale, export-oriented agriculture have often overshadowed support for sovereign and local food systems. Land remains highly concentrated, with family farmers - who make up the majority of agricultural establishments and provide most of the labour - owning only a quarter of the land. Meanwhile, public investment, primarily disbursed through the Plano Safra, continues to sustain industrial agriculture, despite it often perpetuating unsustainable and unequal practices.

The food environment that results from a predominantly profit-driven production system, that is increasingly disconnected from local needs and traditions, is fuelling a growing public health crisis in the country. Food insecurity remains a significant issue in the country, experienced by approximately 28% of Brazilians households in 2023, with Indigenous, Black, rural, and low-income populations disproportionately affected. Brazil now faces the double burden of malnutrition: persistent undernutrition in impoverished regions and rising rates of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases across all income groups. Anaemia, a symptom of multiple micronutrient deficiencies, remains widespread, particularly among Indigenous children and women. These outcomes are shaped by long standing social exclusion, unequal access to food, land, and decision-making in public policy processes, and a food environment increasingly dominated by ultra-processed products. The erosion of traditional diets, once rich in fresh produce, cassava, beans, and rice, has been accelerated by aggressive food marketing, rising food prices, and growing reliance on fast, low-nutrient foods and UPFs.

For traditional peoples, agrarian reform settlers, and family farmers practicing low input, agroecological agriculture, major barriers persist. Despite producing socially and ecologically valuable food, they face significant obstacles in accessing markets, agricultural credit, and public procurement programs. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of infrastructure, and limited consumer awareness hinder their ability to compete with

dominant food chain actors. As a result, even socially conscious consumers often default to supermarkets rather than sourcing directly from local farmers. Building equitable food systems in Brazil will require reversing this trend.

A snapshot of public food procurement in Brazil

In face of these pressing challenges, Brazil has emerged as a global leader in leveraging public food procurement to combat hunger, strengthen local food systems, and drive sustainable food system transformation. Two flagship programs exemplify this approach: the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE). Both initiatives operate on a dual mandate: increasing access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food for vulnerable populations and targeted demographics, while improving market access for smallholder farmers. The PAA, launched in 2003 under the Zero Hunger Program, integrated small-scale producers into institutional markets, offering an alternative to industrial supply chains while promoting agroecological practices and food sovereignty. However, political resistance, agribusiness influence, and funding constraints limited its scalability, leading to its replacement in 2021 by Programa Alimenta Brasil. The PAA was relaunched in 2023. In its first year back, the federal government allocated R$1.04 billion (approx. 208.4 million USD) to the program, benefiting over 44,000 farmers and distributing 70,000 tons of food to more than 6,500 entities, including schools and community kitchens. This post-relaunch funding represents a substantial increase compared to the program's diminished budget prior to its replacement, indicating a renewed commitment to supporting family farming and combating food insecurity in Brazil.

The PNAE, which mandates that at least 30% of school meal purchases come from family farms, has also had a wide-reaching impact. Enshrined in Act 11,947 (2009), the program is a cornerstone of the Zero Hunger Program alongside the PAA. It has significantly advanced the integration of family farming into public food procurement, and has expanded to cover all levels of basic education while embedding food and nutrition literacy, inclusive governance, and cultural relevance of food into its design. Municipalities are lead implementers of the programme and encouraged to tailor procurement processes to local contexts, fostering collaboration between schools, civil society, and farming communities. Importantly, PNAE has been linked to improved health outcomes, including a significant reduction in adolescent obesity rates among students who frequently consume school meals. Moreover, in recent years, there has been growing recognition of PNAE's potential for advancing sustainable agriculture and renewed interest in using the programme as a lever to promote agroecological and regenerative food systems, with support from civil society and international partners.

Advancing traditional food systems through public procurement: the role of Catrapovos

Initiatives like Catrapovos have played a pivotal role in integrating the needs of Indigenous peoples and traditional communities into public procurement frameworks. Originating in the Brazilian state of Amazonas and later expanding nationally with the support of numerous CSOs, including WWF-Brazil, Catrapovos functions as a dialogue platform, conflict mediator, and strategy incubator. It builds on participatory governance learnings from innovative platforms such as Brazil's National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), an advisory council to the President of Brazil that has proven effective in ensuring structured and meaningful participation of stakeholders who would otherwise risk being overlooked in policy decisions. Leveraging this approach at a different governance level, Catrapovos convenes federal public agencies, civil society, and traditional food commissions to

collectively identify and resolve systemic barriers preventing traditional producers from accessing programs like the PNAE and PAA.

Since its creation, Catrapovos has facilitated market access for traditional producers and the inclusion of traditional foods in school meals across more than ten Brazilian states, safeguarding biodiversity-reach diets and strengthening food sovereignty amongst Indigenous communities. Some of its most impactful achievements are the adoption of Technical Note 3744623/2023 and Ordinance No. 20/2023, which simplified documentation requirements, removing the need for land titles and authorising the use of the Social Identification Number (NIS) to confirm family farmer status. This change significantly expanded program access: in 2023, 57% of PAA participants in the North region were farmers from Indigenous or traditional communities using NIS, and 20% of all Indigenous-led projects nationally relied on this documentation.

Catrapovos also supported regulatory advances such as the recommendation 002/2023, jointly issued by the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA), the National Supply Company (Conab), and the Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger (MDS), which enabled the distribution of Indigenous-produced food through public procurement channels, despite challenges in securing sanitary certifications. Additional contributions include the launch of a national information platform and coordination with the Indigenous Health Secretariat of the Ministry of Health (SESAI) to facilitate food sourcing from Indigenous communities for health centres, within the scope of the PAA. Ongoing advocacy focuses on securing approval of Bill 880/2021, which would establish a national policy framework for the promotion of food and socio biodiversity products of traditional peoples and communities.

Currently active in 17 of Brazil's 26 states, Catrapovos continues to expand its reach and technical capacity. Its priorities include making the NIS registry permanent beyond 2027, scaling targeted procurement calls for traditional foods, and ensuring these products are systematically integrated into public programs, particularly school meals.

Equity-rooted transformation: taking stock of the Brazilian experience

Brazil's experience demonstrates how equity-sensitivity in public food procurement policies can drive sustainable transformation across food production, consumption, and governance. On the production side, these programs support diversified practices rooted in traditional knowledge, as well as market access for producers who are systematically marginalised. While the programme primarily benefits rural and traditional farmers, some municipalities have also begun integrating urban and peri-urban producers, though structural and legal barriers still limit their broader participation. In terms of consumption, an equity-sensitive approach is helping bring culturally relevant food front and centre of publicly procured meals. The PNAE in particular is being reshaped to ensure access to culturally relevant and nutritious meals for millions of children, often in historically excluded communities. Governance in the food system is strengthened through inclusive structures like CONSEA and Catrapovos, which embed the voices of Indigenous and traditional communities in policy formulation and implementation.

These developments advance all three equity dimensions in meaningful ways. Distributive equity is addressed by channelling public investment toward marginalised producers and improving the availability of nutritious food in underserved communities. Procedural equity is operationalised through participatory platforms like Catrapovos, which help shape legal frameworks, streamline bureaucratic processes,

and increase transparency and accountability. Recognitional equity is reinforced through the validation of traditional food practices and the integration of Indigenous and community foods into public meals, marking a shift from exclusion to inclusion in food procurement policy.

Persistent barriers remain. These include bureaucratic inertia, inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, and prejudice against Indigenous and traditional producers. Despite Law No. 11947 mandates that at least 30% of school meal ingredients be sourced from family farming, studies indicate that compliance varies across municipalities, often hindered by bureaucratic challenges and limited infrastructure. Interviewees reported how many decision-makers continue to lack awareness of traditional food systems, and complex certification requirements, especially for animal-based or minimally processed traditional foods, further marginalise small producers. Logistical challenges, especially in remote regions like the Amazon, further restrict access. These challenges affect both for traditional producers wanting to access public food procurement programs, and for local communities in need of accessing nutritional, culturally relevant food through these programmes. In contrast, processed foods are easily transported over long distances and have extended shelf lives. As a result, without careful policy design, they may continue to play a predominant role in school menus, despite their significant nutritional and environmental harms. Efforts are ongoing to translate advocacy gains into lasting legal reforms. So too does capacity-building among local governments, nutritionists, and school staff, to shift entrenched practices and expand equitable food procurement.

Lastly, a core tension remains in terms of broader policy contradictions: while public procurement is evolving to promote environmentally sustainable practices, Brazil's agricultural policies continue to overwhelmingly prioritise the production of export-oriented ingredients and foods. If unaddressed, this disconnect risks undermining not only environmental equity, but also long-term food system resilience and policy coherence.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Public procurement programs (PAA, PNAE) redirect resources to marginalised producers such as family farmers, Indigenous and traditional communities, enhancing income security and access to institutional markets.	Platforms like Catrapovos ensure marginalised producers shape procurement rules; documentation reforms reduce administrative burdens, enabling more inclusive participation in institutional markets.	Recognition of Indigenous and traditional farming systems through tailored interventions, including legal accommodation for alternative documentation and non-certified but culturally significant foods, shifts norms in procurement eligibility.
Consumption	Increases access to nutritious, culturally appropriate meals for underserved populations, especially children in marginalised communities, through school feeding programs and community-based food sourcing.	Stakeholders, including civil society, schools, and traditional food commissions—collaborate in tailoring food procurement to local needs, reinforcing inclusive, community-driven decision-making.	Public meals include Indigenous and traditional foods, reinforcing cultural identity and countering marginalization of non-industrial diets in schools and health facilities.
Governance	Investments prioritise community-led food systems and redirect public funds away from industrial agribusiness, helping rebalance power and resource distribution in national food policy.	Catrapovos institutionalises the role of Indigenous and traditional actors in shaping public food policy; participatory mechanisms influence legislation and policy implementation across ministries.	Policies and platforms explicitly value traditional knowledge and sociobiodiversity, embedding plural food cultures into national food governance frameworks.

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4.6 Building cooperative food systems from below: collective consumer action for equity and sustainability in Japan

Japan's food system reflects a complex interplay between industrial expansion and community resilience. Despite persistent structural challenges and a policy landscape that often favours market-driven solutions, the experience of the Seikatsu Club shows how cooperative initiatives can open space for more inclusive, locally rooted approaches, supporting fairer food economies, healthier diets, and greater public engagement in shaping food futures.

Transferable principles	Cautions for other contexts
Consumer cooperatives enhance food system resilience. Grassroots cooperatives driven by collective action and democratic governance can build resilient food economies less reliant on corporate-controlled supply chains. Cooperative structures prioritise transparent, inclusive decision-making, empowering consumers and producers alike to shape food practices aligned with community values.	**Structural power imbalances constrain local transformation.** Industrial agriculture, trade liberalisation, and market dominance systematically sideline grassroots initiatives, limiting the viability and eroding gains of cooperative models.
Recognitional equity can be advanced through validation of local knowledge. Cooperatives highlight and integrate local, traditional, and community-based knowledge systems, promoting diverse dietary practices and environmental stewardship.	**Policy incoherence undermines transformative efforts.** Misalignment between local actions and national frameworks, including conflicting priorities and fragmented governance, weakens implementation and stalls systemic progress.
An integrated "packaged" focus on food sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and equity creates resilient communities. Addressing food system equity through fair pricing, consumer engagement, and local economic empowerment generates robust social and environmental resilience. Emphasising locally rooted, circular practices can significantly reduce environmental impacts.	**Consumer norms resist systemic change.** Deeply embedded convenience-oriented consumption patterns and shifting dietary preferences challenge efforts to scale localised, sustainable food alternatives.

Japan's food system reflects a set of deep, structural contradictions. It is one of the most import-dependent countries in the world: it sources the majority of its grains, animal feed, and agricultural inputs from abroad, especially the U.S., while its domestic agricultural base contracts and its farming population ages. Large agribusinesses dominate processing and distribution, linking overseas food production to Japanese consumers through extensive global supply chains. These dynamics contribute to significant environmental externalities: more than a third of Japan's food-related GHG emissions originate outside its borders. Meanwhile, dietary patterns in Japan have shifted considerably. The consumption of UPFs has increased in recent years, now accounting for over 38% of daily energy intake among adults. This marks a notable departure from Japan's traditional diet, driven by changing lifestyles, urbanisation, and the growing influence of convenience-oriented food systems. At the same time, Japan plays an active role in shaping the regional food economy. Through corporate expansion, official development assistance, and agro-food outsourcing across Asia, Japanese food conglomerates have helped establish a corporate food regime increasingly reliant on biotechnology, life science industries, and automation. These developments have coincided with worsening public health indicators in the country and the region, including a growing burden of diet-related NCDs. National policy measures to regulate unhealthy food environments remain limited, with weak implementation on labelling, marketing, and retail practices. Food waste in Japan remains high, while the agricultural sector continues to

lose ground due to a lack of young successors and declining rural vitality.

Recent global and domestic shocks have exposed the underlying fragilities of the Japanese systems. The COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and a weakening yen have pushed up the cost of imported food, fuel, and fertilisers. Climate-related disasters, livestock disease outbreaks, and logistics disruptions have intensified pressures on production and access. With a food self-sufficiency rate hovering at just 38% in terms of meeting caloric needs, food sovereignty concerns are mounting. Rising food prices, uneven access to healthy diets, and deregulated food safety standards, shaped in part by U.S. trade influence, have fuelled public distrust, especially around genetically modified and genome-edited foods. While the government has responded with updated strategies - such as the revised Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas, the Health Japan 21 plan, the Moonshot innovation program, and the Strategy MIDORI, a climate-smart roadmap for decarbonisation, agrochemical reduction, and expansion of organic agriculture - these initiatives largely emphasise technological innovation and market solutions.

Yet community-based food practices remain widespread in Japan and offer cultural resilience, environmental benefits, and a counterweight to industrialised and unsustainable food systems. Japan's food system now operates on two tracks: one global, capital-intensive, and environmentally burdensome; the other local, socially embedded, and potentially regenerative. As environmental awareness grows, particularly among younger generations, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) catalyse new conversations on sustainability and food waste, grassroots actors are asserting a stronger presence. Recent price spikes and rice shortages have once more renewed interest in domestic food sovereignty and sustainability. Within this shifting landscape, consumer-led cooperatives are emerging as critical agents of change.

The role of consumer cooperatives in reclaiming food systems through collective actions

The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative Union (SCCCU), established in 1965 as a collective milk-buying initiative by Tokyo housewives, has grown into a network of 32 cooperatives with approximately 350,000 members, over 90% of whom are women. It has become one of Japan's most influential consumer cooperatives, working at the intersection of food, energy, and community welfare. With its roots in collective purchasing, the Club now engages in wide-ranging activities that advance self-governance, promote environmental stewardship, and shift power away from corporate-controlled food chains. Through initiatives grounded in its "10 Principles of Consumer Materials," Seikatsu Club members co-create food systems with producers, based on transparency, fairness, and mutual accountability. The Club insists on full transparency around food origins and production methods, and challenging corporate food logic of commodification and industrial practices like synthetic additives and excessive packaging. Its work shows what a cooperative infrastructure that decentres profit as its main driver, with emphasis on sufficiency over consumption, and mutual aid over competition, can look like in practice. The Club is part of a broader cooperative ecosystem that includes worker-owned collectives, renewable energy cooperatives, and community-based care systems, connecting efforts presenting viable alternatives for providing essential goods and services.

Efforts extend to policy advocacy with the regular submission of formal proposals to all levels of government and the publication of election-cycle questionnaires, pushing for reforms in food safety, labelling, and pricing. Since 1997, the Club has been a consistent voice against the deregulation of genome-edited foods and has implemented a strict non-GMO policy, applying its own labelling system and rejecting

genetically modified foods and feeds across its supply chains. It has also invested in returnable containers and reduced carbon emissions by over 2,400 tons annually through reusable packaging systems. Seikatsu Club has been a strong advocate for transitioning toward coexistence-based local systems across food, energy, and welfare, moving away from centralised, fossil-fuelled, and nuclear-dependent infrastructures. These efforts culminated in a March 2024 joint proposal with five other consumer cooperatives, calling for a fundamental reset of Japan's food systems. Advocacy demands include calls for clear food self-sufficiency targets, robust support for organic and low-input farming, fair pricing for domestic producers, transparent labelling of GM and processed foods, and the integration of sustainable agriculture into public institutions to reinforce local supply chains and community resilience.

At the local level, Seikatsu Club cooperatives have built partnerships with municipalities to integrate local produce into school lunches and hospital meals. Club members elect their own representatives to local assemblies, where they have successfully advanced policies on food safety, waste separation, and environmental health. These efforts are bolstered by deep, ongoing collaboration with CSOs and producer collectives, forming a multi-scalar alliance that addresses both everyday needs and systemic transformation.

Shifting power and building equity with actions across the food system

Seikatsu Club works across all domains of the food system. It promotes distributive equity by ensuring fair prices for farmers and resisting business practices that offload environmental and social costs onto producers and consumers. Importantly, the Club reduces dependence on large corporate supply chains by building independent, community-based distribution networks. This model directly supports small-scale farmers and small- and medium-sized enterprises by providing stable demand and fair compensation, strengthening local economies and food system resilience.

In terms of procedural equity, the Club centres democratic participation in every aspect of its operations. Members engage directly in decision-making, from selecting partner producers to approving product standards, production methods, and pricing. This hands-on governance stands in contrast to the top-down structures of industrial food systems, where consumer agency is minimal, and producer autonomy is constrained by contracts with large distributors. The Club's emphasis on transparency and continuous learning has been key to resisting corporate and institutional resistance to change.

At the same time, the Club advances recognitional equity by challenging the invisibility of small-scale producers, women, and community-based actors within the dominant food systems. It elevates local knowledge, supports farmers through stable purchasing agreements, and validates non-market values like mutual care, environmental stewardship, and community solidarity. As a women-led organization, it has also created space for members to act as civic leaders and policy advocates, breaking traditional gendered barriers to participation in public life.

Remaining challenges are significant. Efforts to scale cooperative models like the Seikatsu Club continue to face institutional inertia, cultural headwinds, and policy frameworks shaped by global market logics. National strategies still tend to prioritise technological innovation and market liberalisation, often sidelining grassroots, equity-focused approaches. Yet the Seikatsu Club's experience offers a working example of how food system transformation is possible and can be rooted in collective action to redress inequities and power imbalances. It shows how cooperative, democratic food systems can be advanced through grassroot actors to deliver environmental resilience, community health, and inclusive governance for food sovereignty, equity, and sustainability.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Secures fair economic returns and market access for small-scale and aging farmers through stable contracts and price-setting mechanisms; supports transitions to organic and low-input farming to ensure equitable environmental and health benefits.	Includes producers in co-decision processes for setting standards and practices; builds collaborative structures that enable equal participation in shaping production systems.	Affirms and integrates local farming knowledge, supports smallholder producers, and resists homogenising pressures from industrial agribusiness and biotech models.
Consumption	Ensures access to safe, transparently sourced, and non-GMO foods for all members; uses collective purchasing to reduce consumer costs and redistribute benefits beyond profit-driven supply chains.	Engages consumers as active participants in product selection, supplier approval, and standard-setting through democratic decision-making and cooperative governance.	Recognises consumers as civic actors, not just market participants; promotes gender equity through women-led leadership and inclusive food literacy education.
Governance	Advocates for policies that redistribute power and resources toward local producers and communities, addressing global imbalances in food trade and supporting national food sovereignty.	Enables meaningful participation of members in cooperative leadership, public assemblies (Dairinin), and policymaking, ensuring that marginalised voices shape institutional decisions.	Challenges structural invisibility by validating the experiences of marginalised communities; embeds food with welfare, energy, and care systems to reflect diverse realities and needs.

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4.7 Land reform as a foundation for food justice and community sovereignty in Scotland

Advancing Scotland's land reform agenda can lay critical groundwork for equitable, sustainable food systems by expanding community access, redistributing ownership, and embedding democratic participation in land use. Yet to unlock its full potential, land and food policy must be more closely aligned. Linking land justice with equitable food system transformation can accelerate climate action, rural regeneration, and public health outcomes.

Transferable Principles	Cautions for Other Contexts
Land reform enables sustainable local food systems. Equitable redistribution and democratised land access empower communities, facilitating agroecological practices and resilient, localised food production.	**Entrenched ownership resists structural change.** Historic power dynamics, consolidated estates, and inheritance laws may strongly resist reforms, limiting practical land redistribution without significant political commitment.
Community ownership advances distributive and procedural equity. Legal provisions supporting community buyouts, land management planning, and public interest criteria embed local voices into governance, decentralising decision-making power.	**Complex bureaucracy limits community uptake.** Without simplified legal frameworks, practical guidance, and administrative support, community groups face difficulties leveraging land reform provisions effectively.
Historical recognition strengthens land justice. Connecting land policy explicitly to human rights frameworks and acknowledging historic injustices provides legitimacy, encouraging broader community engagement and equity-driven reform.	**Policy silos undermine holistic transformation.** Continued separation of land and food policy portfolios limits strategic alignment, weakening overall effectiveness and potential for synergistic impacts.

Scotland's food system faces interrelated socio-economic, health, and environmental challenges, mirroring wider United Kingdom (U.K) and global trends. The prevalence of inexpensive, UPFs drives significant public health challenges, including a high burden of NCDS. These health impacts generate substantial societal and economic burdens, including preventable health expenditures estimated at £2.4 billion ($3.05 billion USD) annually for type 2 diabetes alone. Economically, Scotland's food system is characterised by the dominance of a small number of powerful multinational corporations, whose concentrated market power has stagnated farmers' incomes, weakened local food networks, and exacerbated social inequalities.

From an environmental perspective, Scotland's current agricultural model contributes to environmental degradation, with significant ammonia and GHG emissions, and chemical pollutants entering water sources through intensive farming practices. This has contributed to biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and ecosystems' disruption, undermining environmental resilience and agricultural productivity. Moreover, Scottish farmers increasingly face financial pressures due to rising input costs, market uncertainties exacerbated by Brexit and global geopolitical developments, as well as diminishing returns on their produce. Furthermore, the disconnection of local supply chains, marked by the decline of essential local infrastructure such as small-scale abattoirs and processing facilities, has undermined rural economies and amplified community vulnerabilities.

These systemic challenges cannot be untied from the country's land management and ownership patterns, historically characterised by markedly unequal distribution and deeply entrenched power structures. Originating from the Highland Clearances between 1750 and 1860, and

driven by economic incentives for agricultural "improvement" and the wool trade, vast swathes of common and tenant-held land were converted into large-scale sheep pastures. These Clearances involved forced evictions and mass displacement, altering communal land rights and relationships, and exposing communities to poverty and starvation. The rise of landlordism and enclosure practices replaced collective land management with hierarchical private ownership, creating marginalised crofting communities reliant on precarious livelihoods. The Clearances also resulted in substantial loss of native woodland and biodiversity, reshaping Scotland's landscapes into predominantly moorland and grazing pastures. This legacy of injustice continues today. Scotland remains one of the most land-concentrated countries in the European region, with less than 1% of land transacted annually and no legal cap on the amount a single individual can own. Land acquisition is treated as a financial asset and inheritance practices enable large estates to remain intact across generations, with few legal mechanisms encouraging redistribution. This context reinforces the consolidation of land ownership, restricting land access for new farmers and communities, while exacerbating power imbalances that have substantial impact on the ability of realising localised and sovereign food systems.

Reforming land ownership to shift power equitably and redefine land as a public good

Scottish efforts in land reform over the last two decades represent an evolving yet continually challenged framework, shaped by the will of advancing equity, sustainability, and community empowerment. While significant legislative milestones have sought to democratise land access and ownership, progress has been uneven, and longstanding power imbalances remain deeply rooted. The Land Reform Act 2003 introduced a right of responsible access to most land, the so-called "right to roam", and pioneering mechanisms for community ownership. It granted communities a pre-emptive right to purchase land identified as being of registered interest, and provided an absolute right for crofting communities to acquire land, even in cases involving unwilling sellers. These provisions have attempted to facilitate community land acquisitions, which have the potential to reshape land relationships in rural areas.

The Community Empowerment Act 2015 extended these rights further, by enabling communities to acquire abandoned, neglected, or detrimental land from unwilling sellers, subject to a government assessment. It also removed geographic limitations, expanding the community right to buy to urban areas. Importantly, this Act explicitly linked land reform with international human rights standards, aligning with the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Building on this trajectory, the Land Reform Act 2016 introduced additional tools for enhancing transparency and equity in land ownership, creating a new community right to buy land to advance sustainable development, regardless of landowner consent, which brought into scope questions of ownership concentration and long-term public benefit. This Act also mandated the development of the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (LRRS), which outlines a vision for land as a national asset that supports a just transition to net zero and delivers public value, inclusive local growth and community engagement, while upholding the balance between public and private interests. Lastly, the 2016 Act established the Scottish Land Commission, a non-departmental public body that has played a central role in monitoring and implementing existing provisions, ensuring public engagement, while providing decision-makers with evidence-based recommendations to further advance land reforms.

Yet despite these layered reforms, rural land ownership continues to be dominated by large private estates. This underscores the difficulty of dislodging entrenched ownership patterns and delivering on the transformative ambitions that have prompted reforms. In response, the Scottish Government is now advancing the 2024 Land Reform Bill, a renewed legislative attempt to further tackle persistent structural inequities in land distribution. The proposed Bill introduces a suite of structural changes aimed at further addressing the persistent concentration of land ownership, and at enhancing the role of communities in shaping land use. These include mandatory Land Management Plans for estates exceeding 3,000 hectares - which would have to be developed in partnership with local communities to ensure alignment with goals in biodiversity protection and climate mitigation. Moreover, a new mechanism introduced by the Bill would also allow ministers to assess whether breaking up large estates into smaller parcels at the point of sale could foster more diverse and sustainable land use. This focus on redistributing land access not only addresses socio-economic inequality, by enabling smaller producers and marginalised communities to participate in land use but also strengthens environmental resilience. Diversified ownership and stewardship can support regenerative agricultural practices, reduce extractive land uses, and stabilise rural economies vulnerable to climate and market shocks. To this end, the Bill expands pathways for community land acquisition and introduces standardised leases for environmentally focused use, alongside legislative updates to agricultural and smallholding tenancies aimed at improving access and tenure security for new and smaller producers. Part 2 of the Bill also promotes sustainable agriculture, though parliamentary scrutiny has called for clearer definitions and stronger alignment with upcoming agricultural reforms. At the time of writing, the Bill remains in Stage 2 of the legislative process, and its final form will be critical in shaping future outcomes for food systems, land equity, and community empowerment in Scotland.

Linking land reform and food systems transformation: equity perspectives, gaps and challenges

Scotland's land reform policies, while grounded in land justice, have significant links and implications for the transformation of the food system across its three core dimensions. These land reform policies are in fact a structural prerequisite for meaningful food system transformation that expands sustainable practices and fair, localised food economies. Community rights to use and manage land, particularly where it has been underutilised or hoarded as a financial asset, create openings for new forms of stewardship rooted in a commitment to protect and advance the public good and environmental regeneration. However, despite the centrality of land justice to building sustainable and equitable food systems, the policy connection between land reform and food system transformation in Scotland remains relatively limited. A strategic, intentional policy design that addressed these areas in a more integrated manner, rather than in parallel siloes, could unlock considerable potential for coordinated action on climate, health, biodiversity, rural and socio-economic resilience.

In terms of food production, equitable land reform facilitates greater access to land for smallholders, crofters, and community growers. This has the potential to open up space for agroecological and climate-friendly practices that are otherwise constrained by large-scale, extractive models of land use. While these reforms lay important groundwork, real-world transformations remain at an early stage and will require strategic policy alignment, sustained investment, and robust monitoring to achieve impact at scale. Moreover, land diversification through community buyouts and sustainable

development rights is core to support more localised, resilient food economies that reduce dependency on volatile global supply chains. On the consumption side, equity-driven land reform can contribute to address health and nutrition inequities by reconnecting communities to local food sources. Community ownership models often promote public benefit activities such as growing schemes, food hubs, and educational farms. These initiatives help make fresh, healthy food more accessible, especially in areas with limited commercial retail infrastructure, while fostering food citizenship and cultural connections to land. Lastly, in terms of governance, land reform efforts in Scotland have introduced mechanisms for procedural justice and decentralisation of decision-making that hold potential to prompt innovation at scale. Community right-to-buy laws and the emphasis on inclusive participation in relevant legislation and initiatives pave the way to embedding local voices in land use decisions. This redistribution of decision-making power can act as a direct counterbalance to corporate and private consolidation in the land and agri-food sectors, and can promote a learning ground to strengthen democratic accountability beyond land management.

Across the equity dimensions, land reform has strong potential to advance distributive and procedural equity by creating legal pathways for more equitable access to land and redistributing ownership from concentrated elites to communities. The 2024 Land Reform Bill proposes legal mechanisms that integrate distributive and procedural equity into the operation of Scotland's land market, emphasising community involvement in land management planning and measures to break up large estates during transactions, with strong potential to strengthen democratisation and inclusivity in the food-producing landscape. Regarding recognitional equity, the explicit linkage of land policy with human rights frameworks, and growing recognition of historical injustices and action to fully redress them, are important steps.

Scotland's land reform agenda still faces key challenges. First, the implementation of newer rights, such as the community right to buy for sustainable development, remains limited and largely untested: more practical guidance and legal clarity can activate these provisions at scale. Second, urban land reform is still nascent, and many urban communities continue to face barriers in accessing land for food growing, markets, or community enterprise. Third, fiscal levers such as land value taxation or incentives for environmentally beneficial land uses are underdeveloped - and greater alignment between fiscal levers, land and agricultural subsidy reform, and traditional food policy domains can ensure that financial mechanisms actively support equitable and sustainable food systems. Lastly, to deepen its impact, Scotland must ensure that future policy and initiatives, across domains now siloed under land and food portfolios, are explicitly packaged together in their design, intended outcomes and impact pathways.

Domain \ Equity Dimension	Distributive Equity	Procedural Equity	Recognitional Equity
Production	Expands land access for smallholders, crofters, and new entrants through legal community acquisition rights and proposed estate break-up mechanisms; supports diversification away from large-scale, extractive agriculture.	Embeds community participation in land-use planning via mandatory Land Management Plans and the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement; supports inclusive decision-making in land stewardship.	Validates traditional and community-based land uses, recognises the legacy of dispossession and promotes sustainable, agroecological practices tied to cultural heritage.
Consumption	Facilitates the creation of community food initiatives (e.g., growing schemes, food hubs) that increase access to fresh, healthy, and locally produced food, especially in underserved rural and peri-urban areas.	Encourages community leadership in developing food-related activities on acquired land; connects consumers to local producers through direct sales and participatory food education.	Rebuilds community ties to land and food cultures; affirms the value of public benefit and non-commercial land and food relationships grounded in local identity and self-determination.
Governance	Redistributes power over land decisions through statutory rights to buy, manage, and steward land; challenges elite land concentration and promotes democratic control.	Institutionalised mechanisms for community-led governance and inclusive legislative processes.	Aligns land reform with human rights principles; acknowledges historical injustice (e.g., Highland Clearances) and aims to redress it through structural transformation and inclusive vision-setting.

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4.8. Common guiding principles and cautions for adoption of recommendations in other contexts

As seen, the analysis of each case study included a set of both "Transferable Principles" and "Cautions for Other Contexts". We have extracted the common threads, to produce the following list of *key common guiding principles and cautions for adoption in other contexts*.

Key common guiding principles and cautions for adoption in other contexts:

1. **Power redistribution is fundamental**: Lasting equity requires dismantling structural barriers (e.g., land concentration, corporate lobbying) and redistributing control over resources and decision-making.

2. **Equity must be operationalized, not just invoked**: Policies must explicitly embed **distributive** (resources), **procedural** (participation), and **recognitional** (cultural rights) dimensions to avoid tokenism. This underscores the need to **reframe food as a human right and public good**, not merely a market commodity. Market systems, in their current form, often externalise social and environmental costs, failing to support equitable and sustainable outcomes.

3. **Systemic change demands integrated policy packages**: Isolated solutions (e.g., taxes without procurement reforms) falter; synergistic strategies (e.g., agroecology + land reform + inclusive governance) create resilient feedback loops. Food systems change is inherently complex and non-linear, requiring **coherent and coordinated interventions across production, consumption, and governance**.

4. **Grassroots innovation needs policy backing**: Community-led models (e.g., cooperatives, agroecology) require aligned fiscal, legal, and institutional support to scale without dilution. Effective strategies combine grassroots mobilisation with institutional reforms and align rights-based approaches with market-shaping tools.

5. **Global principles and lessons, local adaptations**: While principles are transferable (e.g., participatory governance, rights-based frameworks), context-specific barriers (e.g., Japan's consumer norms, Scotland's land laws) demand tailored strategies. Equity must be embedded in how food systems are **analysed, governed, funded, and monitored**, ensuring that marginalised actors have agency, their knowledge is validated, and they benefit meaningfully from transformation.

05

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND PATHWAYS FOR POLICY ACTION


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5.1 Key takeaways

The report underscores the need to reframe food as a human right and a public good, thus re-balancing its current treatment as a commodity governed by currently deregulated and financialized markets, which lack human rights-based principles in their design. This does not imply eliminating markets, but regulating them, removing those harmful elements (e.g. permissive corporate concentration) that deepen inequalities and drive unsustainable outcomes that harm people and the planet. **A common message emerges: transformation towards sustainable food systems requires redistributing power, resources, opportunities through equity-sensitive approaches**.

Transformative change must be guided by the principles of justice, sustainability, and the public good, replacing the current logics of excess profit extraction and power concentration with equitable benefit-sharing and increased agency of marginalised actors.

Guiding principles are critical because **food systems change is inherently complex and non-linear, requiring coordinated interventions through coherent "packages" across domains of production, consumption and governance**. Findings show that equity-sensitive strategies are effective when combining grassroot mobilisation with institutional interventions, and rights-based frameworks with market-shaping tools**.**

Equity must be firmly embedded in how food systems are analysed, funded, regulated, monitored, and ultimately transformed, ensuring that marginalised actors have agency, their knowledge is validated, and they benefit meaningfully from transformation. This requires asking critical questions: Whose interests are prioritised? Whose knowledge is validated? Who participates meaningfully? Who benefits?

This approach requires **binding commitments at all levels of governance to ensure accountability, transparency, and justice**. Ultimately, **food systems transformation is a political choice**: one that must confront how markets are structured, how power is distributed, and how intersecting inequities are addressed.

5.2. Policy recommendations

In conclusion, **transforming food systems to avert catastrophic crises requires structural policies that explicitly redistribute power, resources, and opportunities across food system actors**, prioritising the interests and rights of communities, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups. Sustained, meaningful civil society engagement must be recognised as essential to shaping democratic, inclusive, and context-specific solutions. Embedding equity as a foundation for sustainable food systems transformation requires deliberate, structured, and ongoing commitment. Based on a critical review of relevant frameworks and key areas for equity-sensitive action, hand in hand with insights from diverse real-world case studies, this report has developed cross-cutting recommendations and stakeholder-specific actions to guide the effective implementation of equity-sensitive food systems transformation. **The following nine recommendations provide targeted guidance for national and local governments, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders to design, advocate for, and implement equity-sensitive strategies that drive lasting change.**

The recommendations are structured to reflect a logical flow or critical path for advancing equity-centred food systems transformation. **Foundational enablers and structural levers (recommendations 1 to 5)**, create the institutional and legal conditions necessary for deeper structural change and to redistribute power and resources through aligned policies and public investment. **Sectoral interventions (recommendations 6 to 8)** target specific policy domains to make equity visible in across food systems' domains and in communities' livelihoods. Finally, **inclusive monitoring (recommendation 9)** ensures that progress is transparent and accountable.

Policy recommendations menu. *Click to navigate to a specific recommendation:*

Foundational enablers and structural levers:

1. Recommendation 1: Strengthen regulation of corporate practices and public accountability to prevent industry capture and corporate interference
2. Recommendation 2: Legally recognise the right to food, right to a healthy environment.
3. Recommendation 3: Institutionalise long-term, participatory governance and power-sharing
4. Recommendation 4: Design integrated policy packages to shift structural power
5. Recommendation 5: Expand and redesign public spending tools to promote equity and sustainability

Sectoral interventions:

6. Recommendation 6: Ensure equitable access to territories and natural resources
7. Recommendation 7: Meaningfully support the revitalisation of agroecology, local, and traditional food systems
8. Recommendation 8: Reshape food environments and address the spread of UPFs

Inclusive monitoring:

9. Recommendation 9: Develop and fund inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanisms for equity-sensitive outcomes

In addition, each of the nine recommendations is followed by reflections on the contrast with the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition", approved by UN Member States in 2024. We trust that these reflections will help indicate the compatibility, overlap or room for improvement between both sets of recommendations, providing useful guidance to policymakers looking to develop policies based on the CFS policy agreement.

5.2.1 Foundational enablers and structural levers

5.2.1.1. Recommendation 1: Strengthen regulation of corporate practices and public accountability to prevent industry capture and corporate interference

The power imbalance between corporate actors and communities remains one of the most entrenched barriers to equity and democracy in food systems. From oligopolies over input and outputs, to food advertising and lobbying, commercial actors often shape food environments, policy agendas, and public discourse. When this powerful position does not promote public health, environmental sustainability, and social justice, harmful outcomes and crises in food systems arise.

Preventing this requires robust political commitment, legal safeguards, enforcement capacity, and civic oversight. The CDoH framework provides a useful lens for analysing how corporate practices affect governance outcomes and for developing strategies that hold industry actors accountable. A range of tools, including can be deployed to curtail undue influence and redirect power toward democratic governance that fosters sustainability and advances public good:

- conflict of interest safeguards
- due diligence legislation
- human rights impact assessments
- corporate taxation reforms
- mandatory transparency registers

Across case studies, civil society repeatedly had to push back against interference from harmful corporate actors. In Colombia, landmark policies such as the UPF tax and front-of-pack labelling were fiercely contested. Public interest coalitions responded with strategic litigation, independent data production, and sustained advocacy, but the struggle for full implementation remains ongoing. In the Philippines, MASIPAG's community-driven seed systems and participatory certification models were diluted by state-sanctioned corporate frameworks. Meanwhile, in the U.S., path dependencies that prioritise market-driven logic over public interest continue to limit equity-oriented reforms.

These examples reinforce that **equity-sensitive governance must proactively redistribute power, limit corporate control over decision-making spaces, and build institutional cultures of transparency, independence, and accountability**. **Distributive equity** is served when public policy restricts commercial practices that harm marginalised communities and the planet, and redirects resources toward public goods. **Procedural equity** requires policymaking processes that are free from industry interference and open to community scrutiny. **Recognitional equity** is advanced when non-commercial food systems, traditional knowledge, and collective models are protected from marginalisation or appropriation.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

CFS Policy Recommendation number 39 also calls for related interventions, consisting of identifying and managing conflicts of interest "including in research and extension services, by developing and strengthening safeguards, policies and regulations, including those against power imbalances in agriculture and food systems and

those that prioritize public interest, transparency and participatory decision-making." However, recommendations do not go beyond these limited actions, failing to acknowledge and address the role of commercial determinants of health such as corporate political activity. Additionally, no concrete safeguards or policies are detailed to effectively tackle conflicts of interest, although in another **recommendation, number 35, there is certain acknowledgement of the negative role that market concentration has on food systems**. It recommends to "monitor and address market concentration across scales" and the promotion of "diversification and competition in agriculture and food systems", which are indeed very important actions for addressing industry capture and corporate interference.

To build on CFS's general recommendations a set of more specific and comprehensive set of policies are recommended, including **legally binding bans on corporate interference in public policy**, which would importantly move beyond just voluntary transparency measures.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of Recommendation 1

National Governments:

- Enact and enforce comprehensive conflict-of-interest laws, covering public officials, advisory committees, and scientific bodies in food, health, agricultural and industrial domains.
- Mandate full transparency in lobbying, including public registries, funding disclosures, and legislative footprint tools to trace industry influence on policymaking.
- Ban or severely restrict corporate sponsorship of public health, food and environmental campaigns, research, and education, especially by companies producing harmful products.
- Establish independent food ombuds institutions or regulatory watchdogs, with legal mandates for oversight, community participation, and enforcement powers.
- Require that all regulatory decisions be grounded in independent, peer-reviewed evidence, excluding studies funded by commercial actors unless full conflict disclosure and public review are ensured.

Local Governments:

- Conduct audits of procurement and service delivery contracts to assess undue industry influence, and publish findings transparently.
- Adopt local food charters and participation protocols that clarify the boundaries of private sector engagement and promote democratic governance.
- Establish mechanisms to partner with civil society actors in monitoring and reporting on local food policy processes, ensuring independence and integrity.
- Exclude corporations with records of labour violations, environmental harm, or deceptive marketing from eligibility for public contracts or partnerships.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Form independent watchdog platforms to track and contest harmful corporate interference.

- Monitor and publicly document lobbying activities, misinformation campaigns, and financial links between regulators and industry actors.

- Advance legislative proposals to insulate policymaking from corporate influence, including citizen-driven transparency laws and constitutional amendments where needed.

5.2.1.2. Recommendation 2: Legally recognise the right to food and the right to a healthy environment

Legal recognition of the right to food and the right to a healthy environment is foundational to building equitable food systems through right-based governance, as it has the potential to shift what is usually a discretionary policy matter into legally enforceable human rights. Importantly, it can also affirm communities' collective authority to define, protect and transform their food systems, resist commodification of food, and reassert traditional and agroecological systems.

The Colombian case demonstrates the potential and limits of constitutional reform. The right to food was enshrined as a fundamental right, yet implementation remains vague and underfunded, unregulated, and vulnerable to reinterpretation, with civil society continuing to advocate for specific regulations and accountability mechanisms. In contrast, in the Philippines, MASIPAG exemplifies how de facto support for collective authority over food systems can be built and sustained even in the absence of formal legal protections, through seed sovereignty, participatory certification, and resistance to exclusionary property regimes.

This contrast suggests that **legal frameworks must not only exist on paper, but be grounded in lived practice, political accountability, and adequate budgeting**. Legal codification engages all three equity dimensions, but not automatically or equally. **Distributive equity** is advanced when legal mandates guarantee material access to nutritious, culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable food, especially through redistributive instruments such as public procurement, land access reform, or nutrition-sensitive subsidies. **Procedural equity** is supported when rights-based frameworks create formal avenues for participation, grievance redress, and accountability. **Recognitional equity** is especially central here: by affirming the legitimacy of localised food systems, traditional knowledge, and non-market logics, dominant narratives of what constitutes legitimate food production and governance can be challenged. However, legal frameworks without enforcement, resources, or meaningful participation risk becoming symbolic. The Philippines' experience with PGS, and Brazil's fluctuating commitment to public procurement, underscore how implementation is often constrained by technocratic dilution, elite pushback, budgetary fluctuations, or regulatory capture. To avoid falling into this pitfall, **equity-driven transformation requires that rights are translated into mechanisms for redistribution, enforcement, and community collaboration**. This means resourcing implementation, creating legal recourse mechanisms, and embedding equity criteria in food system planning.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

The CFS Recommendations call for several measures that would substantiate the right to food, including through "equitable tenure rights" (number 1), "protecting the rights of informal vendors given their role in food security and nutrition" (number 23), "Develop and strengthen programmes and partnerships, such as those that are state-led or community-led, including community

kitchens and school meal programmes, that foster the progressive realization of the right to adequate food" (number 26), "leverage fiscal space, including through measures such as progressive taxation to prioritize basic public services and use the available resources to equitably support those most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition" (number 30), "address the structural causes of racial or ethnic discrimination" (number 44), or "Promote access to decent work and living income for all in agriculture and food systems…by strengthening and enforcing regulatory frameworks and laws to enable wages that provide an adequate standard of living" (number 46), inter alia.

However, CFS Recommendations **fall short in challenging food's status as a market commodity**, which *de facto* represents a key barrier to materializing the right to food even when complementary and synergistic actions are implemented. Commodification enables speculation on food, leading to price volatility and inefficient access, which in turn causes hunger.

To overcome such gaps, decision-makers can ban speculative trading of staple foods and financialization of land/water essential for food production. To fulfil CFS's goal, states must **legally delist food from commodity markets** and ban derivatives trading.

Alongside, decision-makers can establish institutions, **tools and resources to render states, commercial actors and other stakeholders accountable for infringement on the human right to food**. This can be done through more concrete, effective accountability measures such as **establishing ombudsperson institutions or legal recourse pathways with authority to investigate violations, mandate compliance, and compel corrective action.**

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 2

National Governments:

- Enshrine the right to food and the right to a healthy environment, as justiciable in constitutions and legal frameworks, aligned with international human rights obligations.
- Integrate land-use planning, public procurement, and food access programs under a unified right-based framework.
- Where contextually feasible, mandate independent equity impact assessments for all national policies impacting food systems to evaluate how they affect access, participation, and recognition of historically excluded groups.
- Establish ombudsperson institutions or legal recourse pathways with authority to investigate violations, mandate compliance, and compel corrective action.
- Allocate sustained public funding for implementation, with special emphasis on historically marginalised groups.
- Promote institutional and policy innovation by embedding equity-driven design and equity goals into national policy.

Local Governments:

- Translate national commitments into local policy frameworks with clear accountability measures and co-ownership by community stakeholders.

- Integrate the right to food into service delivery (e.g., school meals, social welfare, food access programs), ensuring these services reflect cultural relevance, dietary diversity, and equity goals.

- Establish local grievance redress and participatory planning forums to democratise enforcement, linking them to legally binding outcomes and budget allocations.

Communities and Civil Society (including producer networks, grassroots movements, and NGOs):

- Build community food declarations, advocate for meaningful implementation pathways, and develop innovative metrics that reflect lived realities and cultural values.

- Use the legal framework to initiate strategic litigation, participatory audits and participatory budgeting, holding governments accountable to rights-based food obligations.

- Demand mechanisms for meaningful co-governance, ensuring community-defined indicators and frameworks are used to evaluate and steer implementation.

5.2.1.3. Recommendation 3: Institutionalise long-term, participatory food governance and power-sharing

Lasting food systems transformation depends on embedding equity and power redistribution into the very architecture of decision-making. Sporadic consultations, ad hoc advisory groups, or technocratic "stakeholder inclusion" processes are insufficient. **Participatory governance must be institutionalised through permanent structures that grant real authority over agenda-setting, budgeting, and monitoring to communities**. This includes - but it is not limited to - the voices, knowledge, and priorities of those most affected by food system injustices.

Across all case studies, participatory governance has emerged as a linchpin of equity-sensitive transformation. In the Philippines, MASIPAG's farmer-led certification systems and rights-based organising embedded community control into food systems. Brazil's Catrapovos platform helped Indigenous producers navigate and shape public procurement frameworks. Australia's Cardinia Kitchen Table Conversations created entry points for resident-led food strategy design. In Japan, the Seikatsu Club exemplifies sustained, bottom-up governance through member-led purchasing, advocacy and electoral engagement, demonstrating how power-sharing can be embedded in food systems through cooperative infrastructures. However, the limits of partial inclusion were also clear: when engagement remains symbolic or fails to address structural barriers, it may deepen mistrust or reinforce inequities. As seen in Brazil and the Philippines, hard-won participatory gains, like simplified procurement access or PGS recognition, can be rolled back or hollowed out when governance is not protected by legal mandates and structural accountability.

Participation must be about power, not about tokenistic, "equity-washing" processes of extractive engagement. When designed with safeguards and legal teeth, participatory governance can strengthen **procedural equity** by embedding inclusive, transparent, and accountable co-governance – which can in turn positively contribute to **distributive equity** outcomes, supporting fairer resource distribution and control over public investments, procurement, resource tenure and use. It can advance **recognitional equity** by affirming the legitimacy of diverse knowledge systems, lived experiences, and culturally rooted foodways.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

CFS Recommendations also establish inclusive participation as a key area of equity action, with number 8 calling to "Facilitate participation of people facing inequalities… in decision-making" and number 29 "promoting the participation of local and community-based organizations and actors in the design, implementation and monitoring of social protection policies and programs". However, there is space to build on these recommendations by providing more concrete actions as well as guidance to develop participatory measures that could materialize inclusiveness. For instance, the creation of food policy councils (or similar multi-actor mechanisms) or other binding power-sharing mechanisms; mandate 50% grassroots organization representation in food policy councils or similar mechanisms, and mandate a minimum number of council civil society participants that cover a specific number of relevant food systems dimensions or issues (health, trade, food environments, labour, environmental defence, etc.); and allocate financial resources to enable the participation of representatives from civil society organizations.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 3

National Governments:

- Strengthen existing or introduce new statutory national food councils, observatories, or commissions with binding powers to propose, review, and co-develop equity-sensitive food policies, including authority over budget lines and public procurement priorities.
- Formally link national structures to local and regional food policy councils to create an integrated, multi-level governance architecture.
- Mandate representation quotas or reserved seats in all national food governance structures for small-scale producers, Indigenous communities, youth, gender minorities, workers, and marginalised urban and rural constituencies.
- Guarantee multi-year, publicly funded budgets for community participation to ensure meaningful and accessible engagement beyond tokenistic formats.
- Embed participatory governance mandates across sectors to ensure legal continuity and intersectoral application.

Local Governments:

- Legally formalise or create local food policy councils, food assemblies, or multi-stakeholder platforms, with clear mandates and decision-making power over planning, procurement, zoning, and investment. Link local food policy councils to regional and national governance structures through formal mechanisms.
- Invest in capacity-building programs for local officials on inclusive facilitation, equity-centred governance tools, co-design practices, and participatory monitoring and evaluation, to shift from extractive to transformative participation.
- Require public reporting on governance equity outcomes, with disaggregated data on who is involved, who benefits, and who holds decision-making power.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Build and scale autonomous food assemblies, citizen juries, or producer networks with the capacity to set agendas, assess planned investments, projects, policies and interventions, negotiate with governments to protect and advance community interests.

- Develop, test, and demand formal recognition of community-led governance mechanisms, such as participatory certification schemes, cooperative procurement platforms, or community food councils.

- Monitor, document, and publicly expose extractive or performative participation practices. Use legal frameworks and media to hold institutions accountable to power-sharing commitments.

5.2.1.4. Recommendation 4: Design integrated policy packages to shift structural power

Single-policy interventions or reforms, however progressive, are often insufficient to address the complex and interrelated structural barriers that shape food system disparities. **Equity-sensitive transformation hinges on policy coherence, institutional convergence, and strategic redistribution of power, using a multi-lever approach that aligns legal, fiscal, regulatory, and governance tools across sectors and levels**. While governments rarely implement comprehensive equity policy packages, civil society actors have demonstrated the strategic and innovative potential of bundled actions: the convergence of advocacy, litigation, community mobilisation, and grassroots innovation into coordinated actions that challenge structural injustice and institutional inertia. These actions have effectively secured policy reform across traditionally siloed areas, all under the shared goal of advancing sustainable food systems transformation.

In Colombia, civil society coalitions helped secure a landmark tax on UPFs, improve front-of-pack labelling, and pass a new food procurement law, that collectively targeted both consumption inequities and producer exclusion, and confronted corporate interference head-on. Similarly, MASIPAG in the Philippines combines farmer-led certification, seed sovereignty advocacy, and agroecological training into a synergistic model of system transformation that advances environmental and socio-economic objectives, as mutually reinforcing pillars of transformation. In Japan, the Seikatsu Club's coordinated action across food access, ecological farming, healthcare, and local energy systems reveals how grassroots-driven policy ecosystems can emerge through cooperation, self-governance, and value-based organising.

Such integrated strategies, especially when spearheaded by governments, can support **distributive equity** by directing public resources toward historically and structurally excluded producers and communities; **procedural equity**, by fostering alliances and institutions that enable inclusive policy development, litigation, and accountability; and **recognitional equity** by embedding plural food cultures, traditional knowledge, and marginalised voices in decision-making frameworks and public policy narratives. However, policy packaging without bottom-up control risks technocratic and elite capture, with diluted impact. As seen in the Philippines with the bureaucratisation of PGS or in Australia's local food strategies, equity goals can be diluted if market logics or economic development mandates remain prominent. **To be truly transformative, integration must be structured to distribute not just resources but also decision-making power.** Packaged strategies must also include mechanisms to guard against regulatory rollback, industry interference, and superficial alignment across sectors.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

The CFS Recommendations #38 calls to enhance policy coherence and coordination at all levels across sectors through mechanisms such as interministerial platforms, and invites to do so "with a strong focus on reducing inequalities". Again, more concrete measures are needed to help decision-makers embed an equity lens into policy packages. In this sense, measures such as mandating equity impact assessments for all policies can help build the needed policy coherence. Alongside, setting time-bound targets for inequality reduction can contribute to rendering coherent policies more effective.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 4

National Governments:

- Strengthen existing or introduce new bodies and institutions, such as high-level inter-ministerial taskforces or permanent councils, to coordinate equity-sensitive food systems action across health, agriculture, education, environment, social protection, and finance portfolios.

- Use national development strategies, climate plans, and food systems pathways to mandate and institutionalise packaged approaches that explicitly address structural inequities.

- Integrate equity-sensitive policy packages into legislation, with binding goals, cross-sectoral performance indicators, and accountability mechanisms.

- Provide incentives, technical assistance, and co-financing for subnational authorities to adopt and adapt packaged approaches tailored to territorial needs.

- Establish regulatory coherence checks (e.g., prohibiting subsidies that contradict equity goals in health, nutrition, or food sovereignty).

Local Governments:

- Develop local food and equity action plans that align with national frameworks but are grounded in local needs, knowledge, and food environments.

- Set up cross-departmental structures (e.g., food policy councils, agroecology transition taskforces) to link planning and implementation across departments (e.g., health, land use, education, economic development).

- Pilot territorially packaged strategies (e.g., pairing land access reform with school meals and producer subsidies) and document impacts to inform scaling.

- Ensure that community-led monitoring and budget-tracking tools are embedded in local planning cycles to assess whether packages deliver on their equity objectives.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Build cross-sectoral alliances that unite health advocates, farmers, educators, Indigenous groups, gender minorities, youth, and climate actors around shared equity-sensitive demands.

- Develop community-defined policy packages, integrating lived experiences across domains, and use them to push for integrated governance.

- Map contradictions in existing policy environments and advocate for realignment.

- Conduct community-led policy audits and equity impact assessments to expose gaps, monitor implementation, and hold institutions accountable.

5.2.1.5. Recommendation 5: Expand and redesign public spending tools to promote equity and sustainability

Public spending — particularly procurement and fiscal incentives — is one of the most powerful instruments available to governments for reshaping food systems in service of equity, sustainability, and justice. If intentionally designed, it can create stable demand for nutritious, culturally appropriate, and ecologically sound food for beneficiaries of public programs, while enabling (i.e. redistributing) market access to those typically excluded from dominant, profit-driven supply chains.

Case studies reveal that public food procurement can act as a systemic equaliser, especially when tied to strong mandates and participatory governance. In Brazil, the PNAE and PAA demonstrate how legally binding quotas for family farmers, when paired with platforms that recognise and work to address the needs of Indigenous producers, can channel public money into marginalised territories, support biodiversity, and strengthen local food cultures. Successes are amplified when procurement is integrated into broader social justice and food sovereignty agendas. In Colombia, the introduction of quotas in national food procurement law shows promise but exposes a critical weakness: legal mandates without robust implementation frameworks, monitoring systems, or disaggregated data can fall flat.

In Japan, the Seikatsu Club offers a compelling example of how civic-led cooperatives can complement - and sometimes outperform - formal procurement mandates through equity-oriented partnerships. Though not state-run, the Club partners with municipalities to supply school and hospital meals using locally sourced, agroecological products, anchored in transparency, local economies, and gender-equitable governance. Similarly, in the U.S., programs like GusNIP and Double Up Food Bucks show that incentives targeting low-income consumers and local producers can advance distributive justice and expand market participation when designed inclusively. These models bypass traditional procurement systems yet achieve similar ends by aligning subsidies with community needs, smallholder viability, and healthy food access. These experiences illustrate how **public institutions can collaborate with trusted intermediaries to strengthen local supply chains, support small producers, and uphold democratic governance in food provisioning**. At the same time, it signals that **higher procurement standards grounded in equity, justice, and sustainability are not inherently incompatible with efficient delivery or economic viability**, offering a pathway that even private supply chains could align with, while continuing to generate value.

Across these examples, **public spending tools** - both direct (e.g. contracts) and indirect (e.g. subsidies, vouchers) - **prove transformational when they explicitly confront structural exclusion and work across all equity domains**. **Distributive equity** is advanced when public contracts and subsidies explicitly prioritise small-scale and marginalised producers, culturally relevant food, and food access to underserved communities, rather than prioritizing procurement standards that value cost or volume efficiency. **Procedural equity**

is enhanced when beneficiaries and producers co-design procurement rules, participate in oversight, and shape local food governance, while **recognitional equity** is deepened when procurement rules validate traditional foodways, non-standard production practices, and local economies often excluded from mainstream interventions.

Nonetheless, **without clear equity mandates, administrative simplification, and participatory design, even well-meaning spending programs risk becoming technocratic, inaccessible, or co-opted by industrial actors**. In some cases, governments may fully outsource procurement to corporations under the guise of efficiency, undermining public accountability and displacing local food systems. Yet public procurement holds transformative potential not only within public institutions, but also in shaping broader market dynamics. **By extending equity-sensitive and sustainability-focused standards to supply chains and market behaviour, governments can use procurement as a powerful lever to realign incentives, support diverse producers, and embed public values in food economies**. Achieving this requires strong political commitment, administrative simplification, and continuous community engagement.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

CFS Recommendations also strongly emphasize public spending tools as a key area for correcting inequalities, as exemplified by recommendation number 5 calling to "Foster inclusive public procurement, food-based safety nets" that prioritize sustainable food "while implementing policies that prioritize peasants, smallholders, family farmers, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities." This recommendation can benefit from more actionable measures on food public procurement and public spending tools such as specific binding targets or quotas (e.g., reserving X% of procured food from smallholders, as well as X% of procured food produced under agroecological and other sustainable approaches). Targets should ideally include a stepwise approach, defining milestones (e.g. 10% within first 3 years; 30% within 6 years; 50% within 8 years).

CFS Policy Recommendations also call for prioritizing basic public services (CFS Recommendation number 30). A specific measure that can complement this action is to invest in publicly owned food hubs or logistics platforms to reduce reliance on dominant distributors. The following section lists this as well as other detailed and stakeholder-specific actions that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 5

National Governments:

- Establish a national equity framework for public food procurement with clear targets, enforcement mechanisms, and budget allocations, integrated into food sovereignty and social protection legislation.

- Institutionalise public spending tools that reflect the full costs and benefits of food systems, including environmental, health, and social impacts. By institutionalising approaches such as true cost accounting, governments can align procurement decisions with long-term public interest.

- Leverage public procurement as a strategic entry point for market transformation, using institutional food purchasing to pilot and refine inclusive, sustainability-focused

standards. Once proven effective, these practices can be progressively extended beyond public contracts to influence broader food markets and supply chain norms.

- Mandate minimum quotas for public institutions to source from agroecological, smallholder, Indigenous, and community-based producers.

- Create flexible eligibility systems, recognising cooperative membership, community certification, and customary and informal tenure systems.

- Launch public food subsidy schemes designed with multiple goals: equitable access to healthy and sustainable food for low-income consumers, and market support for historically marginalised and environmentally friendly producers.

- Invest in publicly owned food hubs or logistics platforms to reduce reliance on dominant distributors and expand community access to procurement channels.

Local Governments:

- Co-develop inclusive procurement frameworks with producer cooperatives, grassroots food actors, and civil society, ensuring low barriers to entry and multi-year contract options.

- Set up public provisioning partnerships that connect local farmers with schools, hospitals, and food assistance programs via community-based aggregators or procurement platforms. Keep food from going to waste by promoting facilitating food waste prevention and/or redistribution.

- Establish community oversight bodies - with binding influence - to review procurement performance, resolve grievances, and guide reinvestment.

- Package together public spending tools with other local strategies (e.g., land access, training, food entrepreneurship) to build a territorially grounded food economy, not isolated contracts.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Organise multi-stakeholder alliances among farmers, consumer groups, and public service workers to collectively advocate for equitable procurement policies and oversight rights.

- Build community-led provisioning models, such as cooperatives, mutual aid kitchens, and school canteens, that can partner with public institutions, especially in territories underserved by mainstream distributors.

- Map local food systems and maintain producer registries to improve visibility and readiness of local actors for public contracting.

- Monitor and expose public spending practices that favour industrial suppliers or ignore equity commitments; push for enforcement of quotas, transparency, and public reporting.

5.2.2. Sectoral interventions

5.2.2.1. Recommendation 6: Ensure equitable access to territories and natural resources

Secure and equitable access to natural resources, including land, water and forests, is foundational to sustainable food systems, climate resilience, and just livelihoods. Yet globally, these resources continue to be systematically contested and unequally distributed, governed by legal and

economic systems that entrench exclusion, commodification, and marginalise communities, vulnerable producers, consumers and workers.

Despite its centrality to equity-sensitive food system transformation, reform of natural resource governance is often politically unpopular, technocratically diluted, or co-opted by vested interests, which perpetuate structural injustice. Case studies illustrate this tension in the area of land tenure. In both Colombia and Brazil, traditional and Indigenous producers are often at risk of dispossession and exclusion from land ownership, despite some constitutional protections may be in place. In Australia, Victoria's Future Farmers Pathway shows how governments can support land access innovation, but without addressing land consolidation or unaffordable land prices, the systemic impact of such programs risk remaining limited.

Globally, speculative real estate, land and water grabbing, carbon offset schemes, and greenwashing disguised as conservation, are locking in unsustainable patterns of access and governance. Distributive equity is tested by who has access to valuable natural resources. **Procedural equity** is undermined when governance bodies exclude grassroots voices from tenure decisions. **Recognitional equity** suffers when community rights over the natural resources in their territories are denied legal status or appropriated without consent.

If food systems transformation is to be meaningful, a just access to natural resources must be restored to the centre of political agendas. This entails reclaiming equitable access and governance of natural resources as collective rights.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

CFS Policy Recommendations also emphasize more equitable access to land and other resources as an indispensable measure, such as with recommendation number 3 calling to "Prevent concentration of land ownership". However, as phrased it implies that current distribution is acceptable from an equity perspective, with only prevention of further concentration recommended. This is far from true. **Redistributive measures are essential where land and resources are already excessively concentrated.** Additionally, recommending (in coherence with recommendations on "participatory measures") participatory land trusts or other mechanisms to administer and manage the redistributed land, would be beneficial**.** Further, the CFS recommendation does little more than invoke this goal, **lacking any concrete equity actions to prevent concentration of land ownership**. Lastly, the CFS recommendation **does not deal with one of the drivers of land concentration: speculation and financialization.**

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 6

National Governments:

- Enact redistributive policies for access to natural resources, prioritising equitable governance of land, water, and other natural resources underpinning food systems.

- Legally recognise and protect communal and traditional tenure systems, ensuring inclusive, pluralistic legal frameworks that uphold collective rights.

- Integrate secure and equitable access and ownership of natural resources into national food systems, biodiversity, and climate adaptation strategies, recognising tenure rights as a critical enabler of sustainable food systems and resilience.

- Establish public resource banks and community trust frameworks, shielding natural resources from speculation and enabling equitable redistribution.

- Ban foreign or speculative resource acquisition in territories designated essential for food sovereignty and environmental protection.

- Strengthen, build capacity and support civil society organizations, including consumer associations to defend rights and enable access to natural resources.

Local Governments:

- Develop local governance frameworks and spatial planning tools that prioritise equitable access to territories and prevent conversion or privatisation of essential resources.

- Facilitate participatory mapping and recognition of informal or collective use rights in rural, peri-urban, and coastal areas, supporting local and traditional land and water users.

- Collaborate with civil society and producer networks to develop local incubators for agroecological and low-impact livelihoods, combining access to land or water with training, infrastructure, and community support.

- Expand public access schemes for territories and natural resources, such as public leasing of land or fisheries, targeting historically marginalised users.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Organise to document, defend and formalise customary rights over land, waters, and other natural resources through legal advocacy.

- Monitor and expose resource grabs, speculative pressures, and greenwashing schemes that displace food producers or restrict community rights under the guise of sustainability or climate action.

- Build solidarity economies, food commons, and collective stewardship models that challenge resource commodification and demonstrate alternatives to private ownership.

- Forge transnational alliances for agrarian and resource justice, sharing strategies and legal tools to resist displacement, assert sovereignty, and defend territorial rights.

5.2.2.2. Recommendation 7: Meaningfully support the revitalisation of agroecology, local and traditional food systems

Agroecology, local and traditional food systems offer cultural, political, and ecological counterpoints to the dominance of industrial agriculture. Rooted in place-based knowledge, cultural identity, biodiversity stewardship, and collective care, they offer transformational pathways to address climate breakdown, socio-economic disparities, and structural exclusion. Yet these systems have been systematically undermined by colonial legacies, state neglect, and corporate consolidation. **To revitalise, and not merely preserve them, is critical to realising meaningful food**

systems transformation and to advancing all three dimensions of equity.

Case studies reviewed in this report illustrate vividly the transformative potential and the systemic barriers facing agroecological and traditional food systems. MASIPAG in the Philippines demonstrates how farmer-led seed breeding, agroecological experimentation, and knowledge sharing build sustainable food systems while enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity. Their model actively resists privatization, regulatory exclusion, and dependency cycles fostered by corporate agribusiness. In Brazil, the Catrapovos platform has reduced legal and technical barriers for Indigenous producers to access institutional markets, embedding their food production practices and consumption preferences in public policy. Yet, the need for continual regulatory vigilance and dedicated infrastructure remains acute. In Japan, the Seikatsu Club has redefined consumer-producer relations through cooperation rooted in environmental integrity and shared values. The Club has had long-standing partnerships with agroecological producers, and exemplifies how cooperatives can contribute to revitalising localised food systems that contribute to socio-economic and environmental objectives. In Scotland, land reform provides a crucial entry point to re-territorialise food production and empower community growers, but agroecology has yet to be fully anchored in agricultural and land use policy.

However, **without structural and legal support, agroecology and traditional food systems risk remaining marginalised or being co-opted by technocratic "green" transitions that reduce them to a depoliticised toolkit.** Sustained investment, legal protection of traditional foodways, and redistribution of power and resources to communities historically excluded from dominant food regimes are necessary to centre and support the revitalisation of both approaches, which have a strong potential for equity-sensitive transformation. **Distributive equity** is strengthened when traditional and agroecological producers gain access to land, infrastructure, finance, and markets; recognitional equity is advanced by legitimising and investing in traditional and local knowledge systems through embedded governance and budgetary commitments. **Procedural equity** is fulfilled when these communities lead decision-making on research, certification, safety standards, and food system priorities. **Recognitional equity** is strengthened when research and development, legal and policy instruments formally affirm the legitimacy of Indigenous and local knowledge systems, non-market foodways, and culturally specific agricultural practices.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

Several of the CFS Policy Recommendations (5, 18, 19, 36) also pinpoint agroecology and other innovative approaches as well as traditional and local knowledge as key strategies to equitably transform food systems. Here again the CFS recommendations have a lot of room for improvement by moving from the general to the specific. More detailed responses include setting mandates to increase public and private investment in agroecology and other innovative approaches; Establishing targets to train farmers in agroecology and other innovative approaches; Develop policies that de-risk and fiscally incentivise private capital to finance agroecological transitions; Create national and or regional/local agroecology funds, prioritizing grants (not just loans) for smallholders Indigenous groups; Call for legally protecting seed sovereignty, and thus revisit intellectual property laws. Require public universities to collaborate with Indigenous knowledge holders; Replace yield-only metrics with biodiversity, soil health, and equity indicators.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 7

National Governments:

- Codify agroecology principles as both a right and a governance principle, ensuring protections for culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable diets, and community-defined, localised food systems.
- Allocate public funding to agroecological and farmer-to-farmer training, community seed banks, and culturally rooted food infrastructures. Prioritise support for territories where traditional foodways remain under threat. To enable this effectively, set mandates to increase public and private investment in agroecology and other innovative approaches. Create national and or regional/local agroecology funds, prioritizing grants (not just loans) for smallholders and Indigenous groups, and women-led small and medium businesses and cooperatives.
- Provide fiscal incentives to businesses that source from agroecological producers.
- Establish publicly backed loan guarantees to de-risk private lending to agroecology transitions. Establish impact investment vehicles with patient capital (Slow Money with 10+ year returns).
- Establish land access programs for Indigenous and smallholder farmers.
- Establish ambitious time-bound targets to train farmers in agroecology and other innovative approaches.
- Prioritise farmer-led research and community-based knowledge in public research and development programs. Embed agroecology in national development plans, climate strategies, and biodiversity policies with clear financial commitments.
- Legally recognise traditional food systems and seed commons. Protect farmer-managed seed exchanges and remove legal barriers tied to exclusionary intellectual property regimes.
- Revise food safety laws to accommodate traditional food practices. Establish funding streams for food sovereignty initiatives that revitalise traditional and local food systems, including land protection, knowledge transfer, and seed preservation.

Local Governments:

- Launch extension programs co-created with traditional and smallholder producers. Provide support for demonstration sites, collective food hubs, and peer-to-peer learning.
- Integrate cultural food assessments into local planning. Use land-use and zoning tools to safeguard sites and agro-biodiversity from industrial encroachment.
- Institutionalise cultural food assessments in urban and rural planning to ensure traditional diets and foodways are reflected in school meal programs, public procurement, and local food infrastructure.
- Facilitate cross-generational knowledge exchange on local food practices.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Lead participatory research and archive traditional practices through community-led activities and networks.
- Campaign for sovereignty over agricultural inputs and outputs, legislative protection of traditional and local food systems.
- Scale values-based, farmer-led certification models that align with local food cultures and bypass exclusionary market norms. Forge alliances that bridge food justice, food sovereignty, and environmental movements.
- Expand cross-sector alliances beyond food-focused movements, building alliances with environmental, Indigenous, feminist, and labour justice movements. Proactively position agroecology as a socio-political project and bring environmental actors into agroecological spaces.

5.2.2.3. Recommendation 8: Reshape food environments and address the spread of UPFs

Food environments are key determinants of dietary patterns, health outcomes, and cultural continuity. However, t**hey are not neutral but rather shaped by decades of deregulation, corporate influence, and marketing strategies.** Across geographies, UPFs have become disproportionately accessible, affordable, and aggressively marketed, particularly to low-income and racialised populations - not as the result of consumer preference, but of policy choices, market structures, and power asymmetries. They are a tangible, stark representation of how food environments drive the global rise in NCDs while eroding cultural foodways and contributing to accelerating environmental harm.

Case studies showed both innovative reforms and systemic challenges in addressing UPFs and corporate-determined food environments. Rebalancing public and private power emerged as a key prerequisite to ensuring the creation of food environments rooted in equity, cultural dignity, and environmental sustainability. In Colombia, recent nutrition labelling and UPF taxes represent key regulatory breakthroughs, supported by civil society litigation and mass mobilisation. Yet they are continuously undermined by industry lobbying, disinformation campaigns, and legal loopholes that weaken implementation and public trust. Civil society watchdogs and grassroots coalitions remain crucial actors in defending these reforms. Brazil's PNAE illustrates that state-driven food environments cannot just improve nutrition but also safeguard cultural foodways and support small-scale producers, if policies integrate an equity approach and support local, traditional procurement. In the U.S., the aggressive marketing and availability of UPFs in economically disadvantaged and racialised neighbourhoods reflect the intersections of commercial exploitation and systemic inequality. Even where subsidy programs exist, they often operate in parallel to, rather than in replacement of, predatory food supply chains. Japan's Seikatsu Club offers a transformative alternative in its long-term, values-based cooperation between consumers and producers that has created community-governed supply chains, actively excluding UPFs and rejecting industrial standards.

Transforming food environments through equity-sensitive strategies supports **distributive equity** when policies shift availability, affordability, and desirability toward nutritious, sustainable and culturally appropriate foods, especially in underserved communities; **procedural equity** when affected communities lead decisions about local food landscapes; and **recognitional equity** when local and traditional foodways and culinary identities are publicly resourced and institutionally protected. However, **piecemeal**

reforms and voluntary commitments will not suffice. Binding legal and fiscal measures, structural reallocation of resources, and long-term support for community-led models that contest corporate food environments are needed.

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

Here too the CFS Policy Recommendations align closely with this study's own recommendations. CFS Recommendations 21 to 26 deal with food environments, including Proactive Planning for Healthy Food Environments, Clear Consumer Information (Front-of-Package Labelling), Support for Informal Food Vendors, and include also prevention of child labour and of food loss and waste in this category.

Proven measures can complement these recommendations, such as the adoption of special taxes or marketing bans. Apply a special "health tax" to unhealthy UPFs has been proven beneficial as complement to front-of-package labelling. Alongside, banning child-targeted marketing of harmful UPFs as well as mandating warning labels on harmful products - much like the measures that have been applied to tobacco in recent years - are also impactful to drive equity.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 8

National Governments:

- Implement progressive taxes on UPFs and use the revenues to fund local food systems, cultural food education, and subsidies for fresh, traditional foods.
- Ban misleading and aggressive food marketing, especially those targeting children and marginalised communities.
- Mandate front-of-pack warning labels, free from industry interference, backed by public health evidence.
- Integrate food environment reform into national health, biodiversity, and education plans, with binding equity indicators and community participation mandates.

Local Governments:

- Use zoning laws to limit fast food outlets near schools and underserved neighbourhoods.
- Support school meals and public food provision that prioritise fresh, local, and culturally rooted foods.
- Invest in local food infrastructure (e.g., markets, mobile grocers, community kitchens) co-designed with and co-governed by communities.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Expose and resist the normalization of UPFs through public campaigns, community-based research and mobilisation, and strategic litigation.
- Create cooperative food environments that prioritise sustainable food, social solidarity, and cultural continuity.
- Promote public education and behaviour change to reduce food waste and support sustainable, healthy diets. Launch intergenerational programs to reclaim and transmit traditional food knowledge and preparation skills.

- Build cross-sector coalitions that connect public health, racial justice, environmental movements, and consumer groups, to demand systemic regulation of harmful food environments.

5.2.3. Inclusive Monitoring

5.2.3.1. Recommendation 9: Develop and fund inclusive monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms for equity-sensitive outcomes

Outcomes across equity dimensions must be measured and monitored. Throughout case studies, persistent gaps in data availability, lack of disaggregation, and weak or inaccessible accountability frameworks have made it difficult to assess whether food systems reforms are actually reducing structural inequities. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems, co-designed with communities and grounded in the objective of advancing justice, are essential to avoid technocratic drift and to ensure that equity is embedded in both process and outcomes.

Colombia's civil society response illustrates the power of grassroots accountability infrastructures: organisations have built independent platforms to track policy implementation, monitor corporate interference, and mobilise data for litigation and advocacy. Effective monitoring of equity outcomes can advance procedural equity when it centres the participation of historically excluded and routinely marginalised actors in defining what is measured and how. It can support distributive equity when tracking reveals and helps correct disparities in public investment, access, or outcomes. Moreover, it can promote recognitional equity when monitoring tools validate traditional knowledge systems and community-defined priorities. However, **without legal anchoring, sustained funding, and feedback loops for accountability, even participatory monitoring of equity outcomes risks becoming symbolic.**

Enhancing the "CFS Policy Recommendations on reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition"

Monitoring, evaluation and accountability measures appear across up to 12 of CFS's Policy Recommendations – 3, 4, 8, 12, 29, 35, and the entire section D, which spans from 53-58. While this is positive overall, there is room to improve recommendations in terms of the procedural and recognitional dimensions of equity. For instance, creating accountability mechanisms and institutions which allow for civil society organizations and communities' participation, which would improve the equity of such systems.

The following section lists the range of stakeholder-specific action that would render CFS Policy Recommendations more actionable, concrete, and effective.

Stakeholder-specific actions for the implementation of the study's Recommendation 9

National Governments:

- Develop national equity dashboards for food systems, with indicators across all food system domains and disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, class, age, and geography.
- Fund community-led evaluation and research programs, ensuring traditional and marginalised communities shape methods and metrics.
- Tie public budgets and program renewals to performance on equity-sensitive targets, including redistribution, inclusion, and recognition metrics.

Local Governments:

- Build capacity for equity audits, establishing participatory monitoring and regular public reporting mechanisms on food systems transformation - including rights-holders in oversight roles with decision-making power.

- Co-design monitoring and evaluation frameworks with community stakeholders that reflect local knowledge, needs, and food cultures.

Communities and Civil Society:

- Organise and lead community scorecards, social audits, and participatory action research linked to food access, procurement, and governance, documenting implementation gaps and structural barriers.

- Advocate for grievance mechanisms and ombudsperson offices that offer legal pathways for redress and citizen oversight, especially for marginalised groups.

5.3. Summary of Enhancements to CFS Policy Recommendations

Most of this report's policy recommendations align broadly with the ***CFS Recommendations to address inequalities in food security and nutrition***[237], particularly on ***rights-based approaches, agroecology, corporate accountability, and participatory governance.*** However, this study's recommendations aimed to provide ***more specific institutional mechanisms*** (e.g., food ombudsperson institutions, procurement exclusions, public procurement quotas, etc.) ***as well as actions to trigger structural power shifts*** (e.g., decommodification, anti-speculative policies, land redistribution through communal land trusts, etc.) that are either implied or not explicitly detailed in the CFS Policy Recommendations. **Table 8** aims to provide a simplified comparison to visualize these differences by summarizing the main gaps and the study's proposed action to overcome them.

TABLE 8. SUMMARY OF ENHANCEMENTS TO CFS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY-SENSITIVE FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

	Recommendation Category & Number	Study's Recommendation Title	Identified Gaps in CFS Policy Recommendations	Proposed Enhancements / Concrete Actions to Overcome Gaps
FOUNDATIONAL ENABLERS & STRUCTURAL LEVERS	**1**	**Strengthen regulation of corporate practices and public accountability**	Fails to acknowledge the role of **commercial determinants of health** and corporate political activity. Lacks **concrete safeguards** to effectively tackle conflicts of interest (beyond general calls for transparency).	• Enact **legally binding bans** on corporate interference in public policy. • Mandate **full transparency in lobbying** (public registries, disclosures). • **Ban corporate sponsorship** of public health/food campaigns and research. • Establish **independent food ombuds institutions** with enforcement powers.
	2	**Legally recognise the right to food and the right to a healthy environment**	Falls short in challenging food's status as a **market commodity**, a key barrier to materializing the right to food. Lacks **concrete accountability measures** for violations.	• **Ban speculative trading** of staple foods and financialization of essential land/water. • **Delist food from commodity markets** and ban derivatives trading. • Establish **ombudsperson institutions** with authority to investigate violations and mandate compliance.
	3	**Institutionalise long-term, participatory food governance and power-sharing**	Provides general calls for participation but lacks **concrete actions and guidance** to materialize meaningful inclusiveness.	• Create **food policy councils** (or similar) with **binding power-sharing mechanisms**. • **Mandate representation quotas** (e.g., 50% grassroots) in governance bodies. • **Allocate financial resources** to enable meaningful civil society participation.
	4	**Design integrated policy packages to shift structural power**	Calls for policy coherence but lacks **specific measures** to embed an equity lens into coherent policy packages.	• **Mandate equity impact assessments** for all policies affecting food systems. • Set **time-bound targets for inequality reduction** to guide and evaluate policy coherence.
	5	**Expand and redesign public spending tools**	Emphasizes inclusive procurement but lacks **actionable measures and binding targets**.	• Establish **specific binding quotas** for sourcing from smallholders and agroecological producers (e.g., 30% within 6 years). • **Invest in publicly owned food hubs** or logistics platforms to break distributor dominance. • **Institutionalize true cost accounting** to align spending with long-term public interest.
SECTORAL INTERVENTIONS	**6**	**Ensure equitable access to territories and natural resources**	Only calls to *prevent further* land concentration, implying current distribution is acceptable. Lacks **concrete redistributive actions** and does not address drivers like **speculation and financialization**.	• Enact **redistributive policies** for land and natural resources where concentration is high. • Establish **participatory land trusts** or community trust frameworks. • **Ban foreign or speculative acquisition** of essential food-producing territories.
	7	**Meaningfully support the revitalisation of agroecology**	Pinpoints agroecology as key but remains general, lacking **specific, actionable support mechanisms**.	• **Set mandates to increase public/private investment** in agroecology. • **Establish targets** to train farmers in agroecological practices. • **Legally protect seed sovereignty** and revisit intellectual property laws. • **Create national agroecology funds** with grants (not just loans) for marginalized groups.
	8	**Reshape food environments and address the spread of UPFs**	Aligns closely but can be strengthened with **more proven, impactful regulatory measures**.	• **Apply special taxes ("health taxes")** on unhealthy UPFs. • **Ban child-targeted marketing** of harmful products. • **Mandate warning labels** on UPFs, free from industry interference.
INCLUSIVE MONITORING	**9**	**Develop inclusive monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms**	While frequently mentioned, recommendations lack focus on the **procedural and recognitional equity** of the monitoring systems themselves.	• Create **accountability mechanisms and institutions** that allow for **participation by civil society and communities** in monitoring and oversight. • **Fund community-led evaluation** and research programs. • **Tie public budgets** to performance on equity-sensitive targets.

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