



AGRA
Sustainably Growing
Africa's Food Systems



Ghana must do more to deliver nutritious diet to its citizens

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The Food Systems Concept

The food system “encompasses all actors, activities, actions and processes involved in the continuum of food production to consumption, including production, storage, processing and manufacture, distribution, marketing, retail, consumption and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, including the inputs needed and the outputs generated at each of these steps. Food systems involve people and institutions that initiate, sustain, or inhibit changes as well as the socio-political, economic and technological environment in which these activities take place” (FAO, 2019).

Sustainable food systems for healthy diets feature in the Rome Declaration on Nutrition¹, are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are identified as the first pillar of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition², encouraging countries’ commitment and responsibilities for joined-up reforms.

Through FS-TIP diagnostic process and national food system dialogues, food systems in Ghana was broken into four complementary systems, each with its components.



Food supply system

Food systems should ensure that enough nutritious food is available for everyone. The cause of action involves producing food, processing, and packaging, distributing, retailing, and consuming. Primary food production includes the growth and harvesting of crops, rearing and slaughter of livestock animals, milking, catching fish/seafood and poultry (chicken and eggs).

Logistics, processing, and retail focuses on the food services industry, including food wholesalers, distributors, and retailers. This food system involves the safe handling (i.e., distribution/transport/supply, storage, and sale/trade) of food products. It also addresses the management of consumer need and demand and broader issues such as minimizing food waste.

The final activity in the food system relates to consumption of food, including how food is prepared, cooked and its nutrition value.



Environmental system

On the environmental dimension, sustainability is determined by ensuring that the impacts of food system activities on the surrounding natural environment are neutral or positive, taking into consideration biodiversity, water, soil, animal and plant health, the carbon footprint, the water footprint, food loss and waste, and toxicity. It takes into consideration, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, mitigation, and adaptation to the impacts of climate change and management of the waste products of food production and consumption activities.



Health system

Health system looks at actions that focus on improving the nutritional quality of food along the food supply chain and creating healthier food environments (1). They include taxing unhealthy options and subsidizing healthy options, protecting children from harmful marketing of food and beverages, ensuring clear and

¹ Rome Declaration on Nutrition: <https://www.fao.org/3/ml542e/ml542e.pdf>

² Report of the Secretary on “General Implementation of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025)”. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/093/77/PDF/N2009377.pdf>

accurate nutrition labels, reducing the levels of salt, sugars and harmful fats in processed food and drink products, fortifying staple foods by adding extra vitamins and minerals, ensuring nutritious foods for healthier diets are served or sold in schools, hospitals and other public places, improving surveillance of and response to foodborne diseases and assessing and strengthening national food control systems. These are longstanding, proven, cost-effective, implemented, scalable and endorsed actions that are monitored by WHO.



Social, economic and political system

Socially, a food system is considered sustainable when there is equity in the distribution of the economic value added, considering vulnerable groups categorized by gender, age, race and so on. Fundamentally, food system activities need to contribute to the advancement of important socio-cultural outcomes, such as nutrition and health, traditions, labour conditions, and animal welfare (FAO 2018). It includes access to information by the public either through the media, education, and culture.

On economic dimension, a food system is considered sustainable if the activities conducted by each food system actor or support service provider are commercially or fiscally viable. The activities should generate benefits, or economic value-added, for all categories of stakeholders: wages for workers, taxes for governments, profits for enterprises, and food supply improvements for consumers.

On political level, there should be adherence to government instruments to create and enforce a set of food systems norms on food systems.





Ghana launched its National Food Systems Dialogues in May 2021. The country dialogues identified gaps in food supply chains, shared good practices and lessons learnt to inform food systems transformation in Ghana and subsequent achievement of national goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ghana was among a few countries whose national dialogues were guided by detailed diagnostics of the Food Systems Integrated Transformation Policy (FS-ITP). The FS-ITP analytics supported selected governments in Africa that demonstrated a robust integrative leadership and capacity, in the development and implementation of an ambitious policy agenda aimed at achieving sustainable, healthy diets for all their citizens.

During the September 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (FSS), the President of the Republic of Ghana, H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo acknowledged that Ghana's food systems were not delivering on safety, equity, sustainability, and health. Further he said that Ghana committed to achieving the following targets by 2030, within the health sector:

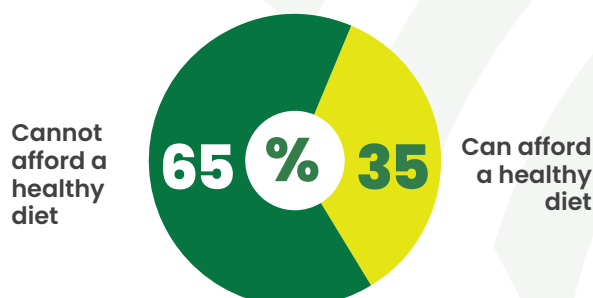


Ghana made 17 commitments both at the UNFSS and at the Nutrition for Growth summits. Post the Summit, Ghana developed a Food Systems Transformation and Nutrition Security Agenda with set objectives and indicators and all these were demonstrations that Ghana was committed to advance the food systems forward in line with national as well as continental and global development goals.

According to the 2022 State of the Food and Nutrition Report, Ghana is among the most food secure countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Prevalence of severe food security in the total population is at 5.6%³. Hunger and malnutrition, however, persist in many parts of Ghana with about 3.6 million⁴ estimated to be food insecure, which could further widen the gap given the unsustainable food production systems as well as the unpredictable shocks such as pandemics (COVID-19) and other natural disasters. Ghana is plagued with the double burden of malnutrition with stunting levels at 19% in children under five and obesity at 29.3% of the population (Ghana UNFSS pre-summit statement 2021).

What is broken in Ghana's Food Systems?

The FS-TIP diagnosed Ghana's food systems and noted a series of challenges. While Ghana has made important strides to decrease food insecurity, only approximately 48% of adults have a diet that adheres to the food base dietary guidelines and net food supply is not enough to meet the needs of a healthy diet, resulting in macro and micronutrient deficits e.g., protein, iron, zinc, B12. Over 65% of Ghanaians cannot afford a healthy diet



³ 2019 – 2021 official national data

⁴ 2020 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis

and this forces many Ghanaians to resort to cheaper cereals. Ghana needs to do more to shift from raising productivity of staple crops alone and increase attention in strengthening markets and growing demand for more nutrient rich foods.

a) Environmental Resilience



Green House Gas (GHG) emissions threaten environment and can harm the ecosystem if not well managed. The analysis done shows that Ghana has slightly lower GHG emissions from food and consumption than the African and world averages (9.73 MtCO₂e vs. 30.10). However, emissions from agriculture are rising annually. Ghana is vulnerable to global climate change and is not ready to combat climate change effects. Heavy deforestation and illegal mining have been further contributing to climate change and biodiversity and habitat loss, with deforestation of primary forests increasing 60% between 2017 & 2018 (FS-TIP 2021).

By addressing the deforestation and illegal mining issues, Ghana can stagnate the impacts of climate change. This can further contribute to the protection of biodiversity both in forests & coastal areas and to the food security of populations living in areas with unpredictable climate while also reducing production uncertainty.

There are a few tradeoffs to consider, and this may include; (i) environmentally friendly agriculture techniques might be less productive, result in yields and less attractive produce, which in turn might be less profitable. (ii) preventing deforestation increases environmental resilience but limits growth of small landholdings and food supply. With these challenges and tradeoffs, Ghana has a few policy opportunities to deploy. (i). the need to put in place regulations against illegal mining and deforestation and strengthen enforcement on the ground; (ii) design and enforce guidelines on the application of fertilizers in a more resilient ways such as micro dosing.

b) Infrastructure Capacity



While Ghana has been improving overall production levels, food supply chains suffer from lack of adequate infrastructure and long transit times. There are discrepancies in prices due to low access to infrastructure and markets by smallholder farmers, with a farmgate and wholesale price gap of 169%. As a result, food loss is approximately 20% with horticultural crops losing over 20-35%, leading to deficits in nutrient supply. These losses contribute to the agriculture environmental impact, which resulted in agriculture emissions growing 32% from 1990 to 2011 (FS-TIP 2021). Ghana can improve infrastructure to improve productivity and decrease losses.

By addressing the infrastructure capacity issue and improving the supply chains, Ghana can



achieve the ambition of reducing both food loss and gap between farmgate price & wholesale price by 50% (from 2015) in 2025. This will enable a lower environmental impact and production costs.

Responding to this has some tradeoffs. Lowering food loss might in the short run result in surpluses which might turn into food waste and lower prices for farmers. Further, higher public investment in infrastructure results in less investments in other critical issues.

The policy opportunities in this area for Ghana include; **target policies to address the need to increase financing & investment, but more focus is needed to assess how innovative risk assessments that can help to resolve current shortages.**

c) Regional Discrepancies



There are high discrepancies between northern rural areas and southern urban areas, with the north experiencing large inequalities in livelihoods. There are higher food insecurity & stunting rates in northern Ghana with average stunting rates at more than 20%. The lower diet quality and supply of macro and micronutrients is evident in northern region of Ghana, with lower consumption of fruits & vegetables.

There is also higher costs of a healthy diet in the north due to unpredictable rainfall patterns and low purchasing power due to income inequalities. Ghana needs to increase the focus in the northern & rural regions to improve livelihoods and inequalities. By further developing food systems in the northern regions, Ghana can achieve the ambition of less than 5% undernourishment rate by 2025 (FS-TIP 2021). The food systems development results in more equitable livelihoods across the country, reduced income inequalities and healthier and nourished population.

There are tradeoffs to consider. Higher focus on the north might result in declining results in other regions. Heavier production in the north to increase food availability might lead to higher impacts of climate change and increasing deforestation. Increasing agro-processing in rural areas provides jobs but raises need for waste management infrastructure. The Policy opportunities include social safety net in the lowest income bracket to addressed apart from existing projects of the LEAP 1 and GFSP 2.

How can Ghana fix the food system?



Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all – This must start with designing and implementation of effective agricultural policies and programs with emphasis on the production of more nutritious crops such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, and animal products as well as making them accessible throughout the year. The Government should also ensure implementation of proper safety standards and guidelines for post-harvest handling to avoid contamination of foodstuffs e.g., aflatoxin control in maize, sorghum, and groundnut. In addition, the Government must invest in consumer awareness and education on healthy eating.



Shift to sustainable consumption patterns - Creating sustainable consumption and production patterns means doing more with less. There have been environmental concerns attributed to overcultivation, erosion and deforestation. Ghana can have economic growth and increased food production without environmental degradation. The government is already supporting farmers in reducing the cost of production by offering input subsidies to boost production, e.g., fertilizers and improved seeds can lead to bigger harvests and prevent people from encroaching forests for farming activities. There must be measures to review the national social protection framework to cushion vulnerable groups as well as increasing access to formal social security and social insurance.



Boost nature-positive production - The Government needs to introduce climate smart agriculture if they are to fulfill their commitment to increase production of climate-resilient varieties of diverse vegetables and legumes by 40% (Ghana UNFSS pre-summit statement 2021). This must be accompanied by advocacy; the Government should embark on information raising campaigns targeting specific geographic areas and train farmers on coping with climate change and variance. Agriculture practices should be accompanied by environment remediation activities such as planting trees, terracing and conservation of biodiversity.



Advance equitable livelihoods - Government can put market structures in place and provide conducive environment to enable transparent, legal trading and financial arrangements that are inclusive. Improving infrastructure and services e.g., transportation and insurance can stabilize volumes and prices and eradicate exploitation of farmers by middlemen. Ghana must also include marginalized groups, women, and youth by creating opportunities for participation in the agriculture space. The Government must commit to removing gender specific, gender-intensified, and gender-imposed barriers to women participation or access to services. Those in leadership can also empower smallholder farmers, women and youth to produce more efficiently with greater access to land and tenure security and other productive resources.



Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stress - There are economic disparities between the regions, with the Northern region being the most economically vulnerable. Ghana needs to map household characteristics and needs of the regions and develop strategic plans for building resilience. Since the Northern part of the country has been ravaged by effects of climate change and variability, the country must introduce climate friendly agricultural practices to help the communities cope with climate change. This can be both mitigation and adaptation strategies. E.g., planting drought resistant crops and use of irrigation. To promote access to diet diversity, the Government should also ensure that there is access to remote villages i.e., infrastructure to ease transportation of crops that do not grow in those regions. There is need to have balance in gender-based access to services like micro credit and financing especially regarding women and youth who may not have collateral (stocks, title deeds and certificates) for these services. There must be social safety nets to protect vulnerable livelihoods in the face of risks related to climate variability, conflicts and other shocks, such as the COVID19 pandemic.

With the Government's commitment to increased investment in technologies, policy makers can come up with strategies to ensure that farmers in the northern regions are cushioned from climate variability.

Conclusion

According to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Food Systems hold the power to realize a shared vision for a better world. Within the current policy landscape, there are opportunities for more alignment on trade-offs and potential synergies of Ghana's key challenges. In its January 2022, food systems synthesis paper⁵, the government identified their food systems challenges and proposed game changing solutions to address those challenges. To mitigate the effects of nutrition challenges, the government committed to strengthen end-to-end planning for nutrition sensitive production and improve food environment through consumer-focused campaigns, marketing restriction and updating labelling rules. To avoid losing the momentum, policy makers should ensure that proper policy and legislation is in place to support actions that the country has already committed to. This is the only way end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition by 2030.

Key steps include collection of data through monitoring and evaluation of all process, identifying the gaps as well as lessons learned and addressing them, use of data/evidence to inform policy processes, plans and decisions. As a sign of commitment, the Government must stop all the illegal activities like deforestation and man-made environmental degradation and ensure that policies on environment management are adhered to. In addition, there should be a food systems coordinating committee since most activities cut across sectors and there are many stakeholders involved. Finally, there should be public engagement/participation in the food systems dialogue and implementation to ensure that their views and contribution are well captured to ensure sustainability of the food systems.



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⁵ Ghana Food Systems Summit Dialogues Synthesis Paper

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