Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

AGRIFOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC – KEY FINDINGS FROM THAILAND

23rd Asia Pacific Agricultural Policy Forum

Enabling Agrifood Systems Research and Policies towards the Sustainable Food System Transformation in the Asia Pacific Region

18 November 2024

Meeta Punjabi, Senior Food Systems Officer,
FAO, RAP

GLOBAL AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS ARE NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE – FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

The structure and state of the global food system is **future-unready**.
Globally, Agrifood systems face a range of interconnected structural and systemic issues:

FOOD AND NUTRITION	While some populations face overnutrition, others continue to suffer from undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies
NATURAL RESOURCES	Unsustainable farming and livelihood practices contribute to deforestation, soil erosion, and water scarcity, undermining long-term agricultural potential
GHG EMISSIONS	The agrifood system contributes a significant portion of global GHG emissions through various stages from production to consumption.
RURUAL-URBAN DIVIDE	Disparities between rural areas, where most food production occurs, and urban areas, which are major centers of consumption

ASIA-PACIFIC REGION – DIVERSE AND DYNAMIC

The Asia and Pacific region has a **dynamic** and **diverse** nature. The region encompasses a wide range of economic, cultural, and ecological landscapes, each with distinct characteristics and complexities.

DIVERSE LANDSCAPES AND SUB-REGIONS

- South-East Asia
- South Asia
- Pacific SIDS
- China
- Mountain countries (Nepal, Bhutan)
- Australia, New Zealand
- Japan, ROK

DYNAMIC ECOSYSTEM

- Economic powerhouses - highest growth rate of GDP (India, China)
- Global leaders in agrifood export (however this came at the cost of NR depletion)
- Advanced technology hubs and rising digital economies
- Largest number of cities in the world

ASIA-PACIFIC REGION – IMMENSE CHALLENGES

The region is the largest net importer of agricultural commodities (over 40 percent of global imports)

793 million people employed in agrifood systems (largest globally)

High inequality → Asia's average Gini coefficient 44.7 (Europe at 30)

1.6 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet (60% of the global total)

Gap between demand and supply will be 40% by 2030 in the region

Obesity is projected to increase from 14 percent in 2020 to 24 percent by 2035

Urgent Need for Transformation of Agrifood systems

AGRIFOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION – 4 GOALS

Agri-food systems encompass the **entire range of actors** and their **interlinked value-adding activities** involved in the **production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products** that originate from **agriculture, forestry or fisheries**, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded (FAO, 2018).

FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Ensure food security, nutrition and health for all

INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

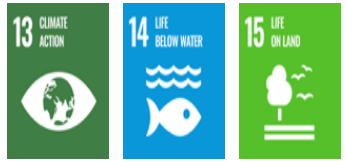
Ensure decent livelihood and jobs ; generate inclusive wealth

ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY

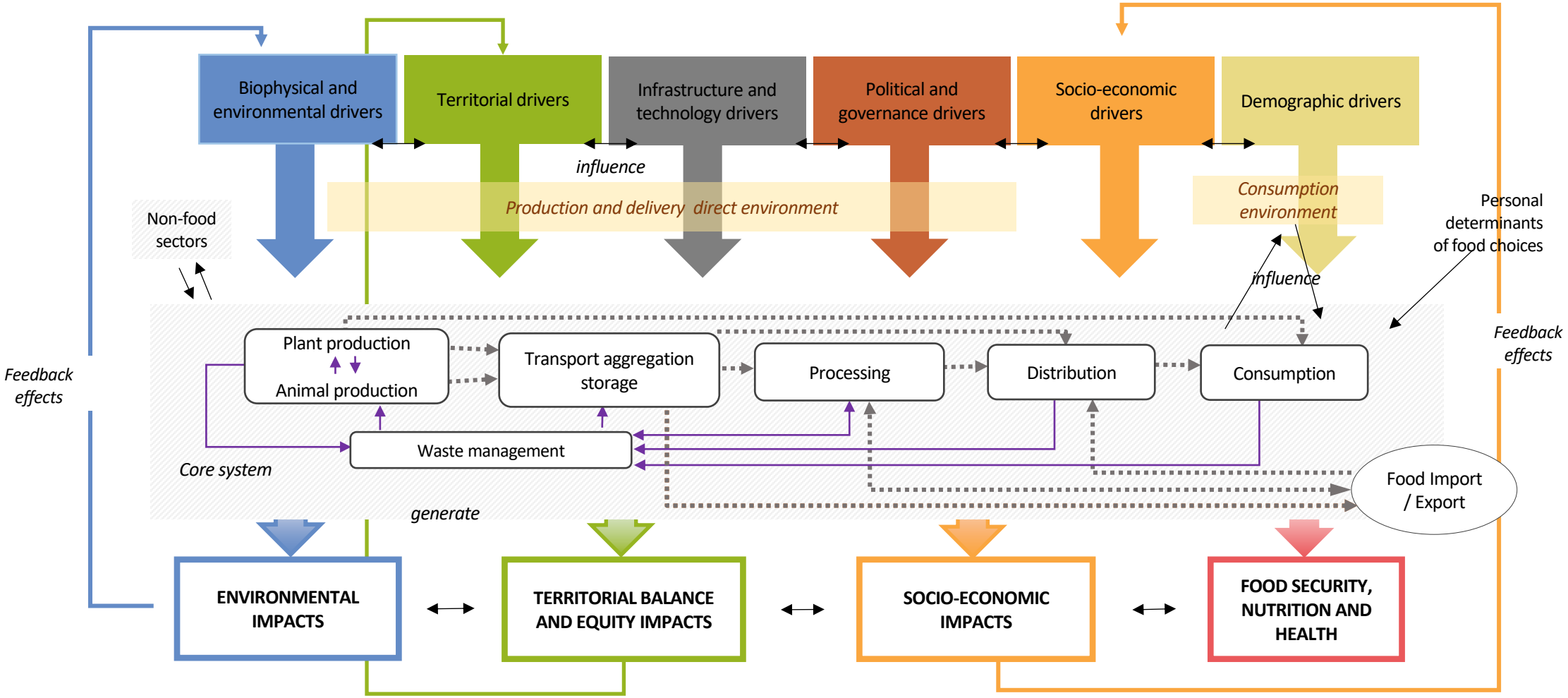
Preserve ecosystems and natural resources ; limit impact on climate change

TERRITORIAL BALANCE AND EQUITY

Ensure equity and territorial balance



Methodology for Assessment of Agrifood Systems – FAO- EU- CIRAD – Applied in 50 countries



www.fao.org/support-to-investment/our-work/projects/fsa2021/en/

Assessment of Agrifood Systems in Thailand– Preliminary findings

Key challenges to agrifood systems transformation

Despite reduction in undernourishment, the problems still persist leading, at the same time, increase in the consumption of unhealthy foods are leading to an increase in overweight, obesity and diabetes.

Intensive production practices based on use of agrochemical inputs leading to degradation of natural resources (soil and water) further worsened by climate change

Despite being a leading exporter of agricommodities in the global market, Thailand is evidencing a deterioration in export competitiveness. Which also points to the need for “sustainable competitiveness”

Current situation of land ownership and access to natural resources combined with farm assistance policies are driving high inequality in incomes.

Assessment of Agrifood Systems in Thailand– Preliminary findings

Entry Points for Agrifood Systems Transformation – Policies and initiatives

Promote nutrition education, awareness, policies and information to improve food consumption behaviors; responsible consumption

Propose the assistance farm package (e.g. financial support, loans with low interest rate, network, farm advisors) to incentivize high potential young smart workers to work in the farm sector

Assess the unconditional farm assistance - switch to more conditional assistance (both financial and knowledge) to encourage farmers to improve their farm productivity and resilience from climate change;

Expand the adoption of climate-smart agricultural innovations and technologies: enhance the use of data, information, and digital science for all actors in the food systems for building climate resilience;

From Knowledge to Action – implementing Agrifood Systems Transformation

What is a Transformed of Agrifood Systems

VISION for Agrifood Systems Transformation

Goals will be identified based on the specific challenges and opportunities the country is facing and the priorities of the country – what objectives it is trying to achieve

Solutions will be context specific – subregional, national, sub-national

DATA AND SITUATION ANALYSIS

Agrifood assessments → Understanding the current state of food systems, identifying gaps, barriers and opportunities

FUTURE SCENARIOS (FORESIGHT ANALYSIS)

- Business as usual
- Worst case scenario!
- Identification of preferred outcomes
- Helps to assess tradeoffs

KEY ELEMENTS OF AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

1 Multistakeholder partneships – government, donor agencies, civil society, private players

Stakeholders should take ownership of both the challenges and solutions. Policymakers, businesses, farmers and consumers must **work together**, each fulfilling their roles to create systems that are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.

Creation of a **people-policy-private sector partnership**. Some examples:

- Community-based food safety, nutrition and cut-food-waste initiatives.
- Food assistance to the vulnerable and displaced in times of natural and man-made disasters.
- The rise of “food policy councils” at local level, where engaged citizens partner with local government and stakeholders to address food insecurity.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

2 Governance structure - ministries beyond agriculture – health, education, trade, environment

Different ministries are involved in agrifood systems transformation because of the **interconnectedness** and **multidimensional nature** of the food system – governance structure engaging key ministries

As an example:

Ministry of health → food systems are deeply tied to public health. This ministry ensures that food policies promote nutritious diets, reduce the incidence of **diet-related diseases**, and **regulate food safety**. The economic costs associated with obesity and overweight are likely to increase from under USD 2 trillion in 2020 to over USD 4.3 trillion annually if prevention and treatment measures do not improve.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

3 Investments - R&D, digitalization, infrastructure, technology and innovation

Investments are critical for the transformation of agrifood systems because the process involves **large-scale changes** across multiple sectors.

Example:
Mainstreaming practices for sustainable agrifood systems transformation. For example, agro ecology based production practices are being followed by a very small share of the producers

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

4 Evidence based - Coherent Policy Framework for Agrifood Systems Transformation

Coherent policies across ministries and sectors are key for agrifood systems transformation

Example:
Policies regarding subsidies for farmers, trade, sustainable agriculture need to be coherent. An intensive production focused policies emphasizing exports may conflict with the policies for improving soil and water situation.

Need for research to fill the critical knowledge and information gaps for guiding policy formulation

THANK YOU