

# Experiences with a Food System Governance Self-Assessment Tool

Report on a tool to enhance reflection and action towards food systems governance

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This report describes the process and experiences of four City Working Groups (CWGs) of four cities in the Dhaka Metropolitan area in Bangladesh in developing and using a Food systems governance self-assessment tool. The tool was based on a theoretical framework of principles for food system governance arrangements. This report covers the process of identifying and formulating ten (10) food system governance practices, the development of a self-assessment tool on these practices, and the experiences of application of the tool by CWG members. Findings show that the tool offers the opportunity for CWG members to engage in joint reflection on their contribution to food system governance and to make 'governance' an actionable concept. More time for reflection on the results of the self-assessment would be valuable to further strengthen the CWGs' contribution to food system governance in their respective cities. These experiences and the tool itself can offer inspiration to similar platforms in other cities in- and outside Bangladesh on how to foster self-monitoring and learning and to strengthen their own contribution to food system governance in their respective cities.

Dit rapport beschrijft het proces en de ervaringen van de 'City Working Groups' (CWGs), in de vier steden van de metropool Dhaka, in het ontwikkelen en toepassen van een zelfbeoordelingsinstrument voor 'food system governance'. Het instrument is gebaseerd op een theoretisch kader dat vijf principes voor food system governance beschrijft. Dit rapport beschrijft het proces van het identificeren van tien (10) praktijken voor food system governance, het ontwikkelen van een zelfbeoordelingsinstrument, en de ervaringen in het toepassen van dit instrument in de CWGs. Resultaten laten zien dat het instrument de CWG leden de mogelijkheid biedt om gezamenlijk te reflecteren op hun bijdrage aan food system governance en het concept 'governance' toepasbaar te maken. In het vervolg is meer tijd voor reflectie op de resultaten van de beoordeling is aan te raden. Deze ervaringen en het instrument zelf kunnen inspiratie bieden voor soortgelijke platforms in andere steden binnen en buiten Bangladesh voor hoe zij hun bijdrage aan food system governance kunnen bevorderen in hun stad.

Keywords: Urban, food system governance, multistakeholder platforms, self-assessment, tool

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# Acknowledgements

This report brings together the experiences of an exploratory exercise to develop a tool for strengthening multistakeholder platforms in their role in local food system governance through self-assessment of and reflection on collaborative action. Deep gratitude is expressed to the CWG members from the cities of Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Gazipur and Narayanganj who participated in this pioneering work and the authors hope the tool will be of aid to their mission. We are very grateful to all the participants for their contributions during the interactive sessions and for the open dialogues that took place.

The authors would like to thank the great support and indispensable efforts from the DFS project staff of FAO, guided by Pedro Andrés Garzon Delvaux (CTA) that supported in the organisation, facilitation and documentation of the dialogue sessions in which the tool was developed and applied.





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# List of abbreviations and acronyms

CWG	City Working Group
DFS	Dhaka Food System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
LGD	Local Government Division (under Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives of Bangladesh)
MSP	Multistakeholder Platform
WCDI	Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research
WUR	Wageningen University & Research



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# 1 Introduction

In a rapidly urbanizing world, feeding urban citizens is increasingly challenging. To make cities' food systems future proof, appropriate food governance structures are required. Although in the urban realm, quoting (Moragues-Faus and Battersby 2021), 'the literature does not provide a clear definition of urban food governance, it is broadly characterised by the redefinition of the relationships between the public sector, civil society and the market (Wiskerke 2009), and the accompanying tools to support these alliances such as food policy councils and partnerships (Blay-Palmer 2009; Mendes 2008)'.

Key aspects of redefining relationships in urban food governance structures relate to addressing both vertical and horizontal linkages (Dubbeling et al. 2016; Gupta et al. 2018; Hawkes and Halliday 2017; RUAFA, FAO, and MUFPP 2017; UN Habitat-III 2017). Vertical linkages ensure that local governance structures link with national (or even regional and global) policies and action, and horizontal linkages ensure that local governance structures are well-connected with society at the local level (Roosendaal et al. 2020). Therefore, multistakeholder engagement is considered a must, and multistakeholder platforms (MSP) are instrumental to effective collaboration with the wide variety of public sector, private sector and civil society actors involved in food issues (Tefft et al. 2021). Local government is challenged to find effective ways to interact with existing formal and informal organizations and networks. Organizations and networks of stakeholders, in general, and the coalitions and alliances that form around specific issues, however, encounter multiple issues (Tefft et al. 2021). In addition, whereas MSPs hold the potential of being powerful actors as key connectors and boundary spanners, they cannot drive food systems change by themselves without support to strengthen their MSP governance capacity (Herens, Pittore, and Oosterveer 2022).

The importance of strengthening governance capacities of MSPs is also acknowledged by four City Working Groups (CWG) in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area. These CWGs, established in four City Corporations in the Dhaka division aim to contribute to the food system of their respective cities. An earlier case study by (Roosendaal et al. 2022) describes how these CWGs contribute to food system governance by using five guiding principles for food system governance platforms formulated by Termeer et al. (2018):

1. Systems-based problem framing
2. Boundary-spanning structures
3. Adaptability
4. Inclusiveness
5. Transformative Capacity

Findings from the case study show that these CWGs contribute to adopting a systems-perspective by incorporating the different perspectives from the CWG members into the definition and prioritisation of food-related issues. They also facilitate boundary spanning connections across different levels of governance (from national to local) and between food system actors in Dhaka. The existence of one CWG in each city allows for adaptability to the specific needs regarding food and nutrition in each city and engaging in learning activities across the CWGs. They also contribute to inclusiveness by inviting different voices around the table such as government, (i)NGOs, private sector, community-based organisations, and knowledge institutes. Finally, the CWGs form a vehicle for coordinated action and prompt decision-making, which could potentially contribute to their capacity to transform the food system in their cities.

Other key insights from the study link to the importance of having dedicated and knowledgeable convenors who know how to navigate the formal governance landscape. These convenors can act as catalysts in bringing stakeholders together and building relations with the government. Government engagement at all levels needs attention from the start, as it may take time to build lasting and fruitful relationships. In addition, the importance of strategizing for the long-term continuity of the CWGs alongside quick action was highlighted. In doing so, it was recommended to start with where the energy is and what resonates with felt urgencies.

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While this case study gives insight in different aspects of food system governance and how these are visible within the CWGs, they do not necessarily translate into what that means for daily practice of the CWGs and how members can operate in line with these principles.

In an effort to translate the principles of food system governance into an actionable tool for the CWGs (and other MSPs), a Food system governance self-assessment tool was developed. The aim of the tool is to support reflection and self-monitoring of the CWGs and improve their efforts to strengthen governance of urban food systems through multi-level multistakeholder collaboration. The tool is a self-assessment on defined practices (observable behaviours, competences) so that platforms can monitor their own performance as food systems leaders and strengthen their contribution to food system governance in their respective cities.

In addition, this tool can foster space for participatory learning within the CWGs. Fostering a learning environment is one of the seven principles for MSPs as it can help enhance their performance (Brouwer et al. 2016). However, it is often difficult for organisations to create space for reflection and learning, especially in a context with high urgencies and an urge to take action. Developing and implementing the tool has created reflection time in the platform, serving the purpose of participatory learning. Since the CWGs are in the process of becoming self-sustaining platforms at the time of writing, this space for learning can be of additional value to the CWGs.

### **This report**

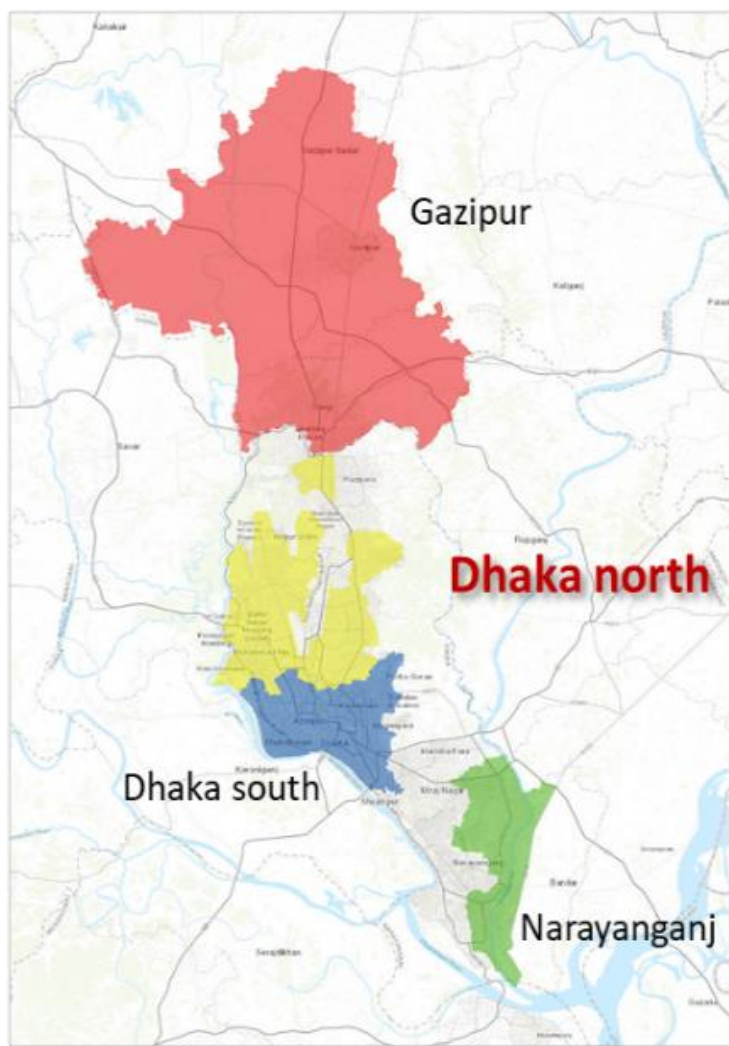
Urban food system governance, in this report, is about “decision-making processes in the food system, how these decisions are made and by whom. In addition, it also links to how these decisions are followed up by institutions at different levels that are involved in or affected by these decisions, for example through policies and regulations” (Roosendaal et al. 2022).

This report describes the development and implementation of a Food system governance self-assessment tool. The tool was developed with and for the CWGs in four City Corporations in the Dhaka Division in Bangladesh. It is based on a theory-based framework of principles for food system governance arrangements by Termeer et al. (2018). This report covers the process of CWGs formulating ten (10) governance practices based on Termeer’s principles. These practices reflect what the CWGs considered relevant and important practices that would help strengthen food system governance in their cities. This process of defining ten governance practices was followed by a self-assessment by the CWG members on these practices. This report includes reflections on the methodology applied and the results of the self-assessment. These experiences and the tool itself can offer inspiration to similar platforms in other cities in- and outside Bangladesh on how to foster self-monitoring and learning and to strengthen their own contribution to food system governance in their respective cities.

## 2 City Working Groups in Dhaka

Central to this report are the four CWGs in four City Corporations in the Dhaka Division in Bangladesh: Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Gazipur and Narayanganj (Figure 1). These CWGs are multistakeholder platforms that were established by the Dhaka Food Systems (DFS) Project under the Local Government Division (LGD) of Bangladesh and led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Wageningen University and Research (WUR). Their main purpose is to explore food and nutrition issues in their cities, prioritise needs and arrive at a joint action plan towards a more healthy, sustainable and safe food system. The four CWGs started in 2019/2020 and have articulated priority food-related concerns in each of their cities in City Food Charters, published in 2021/2022 (boxes 1 to 4). The Dhaka Food Agenda 2041, launched in June 2023, provides further guidance to the action plans formulated by the CWGs (GOB 2023).

The CWG meetings are convened by City Coordinators appointed by the DFS project. Tasks of these City Coordinators involve amongst others planning of meetings, agenda-setting in coordination with the chair of the CWGs, arranging venues and other logistics, and engaging and building relations with CWG members. In addition, support was offered to the City Coordinators by WUR through training in facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and through peer coaching sessions where the City Coordinators engaged in experience-sharing, joint reflection and learning.



**Figure 1** The four City Corporations in the Dhaka Division.

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### **Box 1. Narayanganj CWG**

NCC covers an area of ca 72.4 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of around 2 million people. The Narayanganj CWG started in 2019 and has grown to a vibrant platform chaired by the Chief Social Welfare of NCC. The Slum Development officer is the city focal person. There are 26 members in the CWG who are proactively contributing to the discussion. Public health, food safety and hygiene practices are a central theme within the CWG, and some key activities include hotels and restaurants gradation to improve food safety and personal hygiene, street food vending for safe food handling and hygiene practices and improve fresh market through training and awareness-based market monitoring by the lead of Market Management Committee and relevant stakeholders. In November 2021, the CWG launched the Narayanganj City Food Charter.

### **Box 2. Dhaka South CWG**

DSCC covers an area of 109.3 km<sup>2</sup> and is the most densely populated CC, with around 12 million inhabitants. The CWG started in 2020 and is chaired by the CEO of DSCC. The Chief Health Officer is the city focal person. Some of the central activities by the DSCC CWG are their efforts to strengthen market monitoring for food safety and hygiene by the city authorities, food safety campaigns on fresh markets and training on this subject with poultry and other meat vendors, urban gardening activities and hosting learning visits (for example with DNCC CWG) on model markets in Dhaka South. In November 2021, the CWG launched the Dhaka South City Food Charter.

### **Box 3. Gazipur CWG**

GCC is the largest CC in terms of area, covering about 329.5 km<sup>2</sup>, and the CC hosts a population of around 6.5 million people. The GCC CWG was launched in 2019 and has grown into a platform hosting a wide variety of actors in the cities' food system, from government to NGO/CSO and private sector organisations. Important activities focus on urban gardening and capacity development of actors in the meat/poultry sector (e.g. butchers, slaughterhouses, vendors) on safe practices and hygiene. In April 2022, the CWG launched the Gazipur City Food Charter.

### **Box 4. Dhaka North CWG**

DNCC covers an area of ca 196.2 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of around 6 million people. The CWG started in 2019 and is chaired by the CEO of DNCC and the Chief Health Officer is the city focal person. The CWG meets in the Dhaka North City Corporation. Some of the key activities revolve around urban gardening, promotion of rooftop gardening, awareness-raising mobile courts, and this CC was the first to start a farmers' market under guidance of the DFS project. In April 2022, the CWG launched the Dhaka North City Food Charter.

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## 3 Methodology

The Food system governance self-assessment tool that was developed built content-wise on the guiding principles for food system governance arrangements formulated by Termeer et al. (2018). The self-assessment approach supporting dialogue and reflections, the practical tool development, and implementation were inspired by the Capabilities Framework (Keijzer et al. 2011). The Nine Food System Leadership practices, developed under the African Food Fellowship (2023), served as inspiration to define practices under each governance principle.

The development and implementation of this tool was done in two phases:

### 1. A process to **develop the Food system governance self-assessment tool**

This process started with an introduction to food system governance to the CWG members and presenting findings from a case study that was done on these CWGs (Roosendaal et al., 2022). In this presentation, the issue was raised that the case study described how governance principles became visible in the CWGs, but not what practices define food system governance. In other words: what can CWGs *do* to act in line with these principles?

The five principles were presented to the participants as follows (Termeer's original framing in brackets):

1. **Support understanding and addressing complex challenges** (systems-based problem framing)
2. **Make connections between sectors and actors** (boundary spanning structures)
3. **Provide a platform for inclusive decision-making** (inclusiveness)
4. **Adapt to local context and learn** (adaptability)
5. **Contribute to change for long-lasting impact in the food system** (transformative capacity)

Then, participants formulated practices for each principle that they felt were relevant for their CWG. These practices were harvested and placed on flipcharts, one for each principle. A plenary exchange was facilitated by the facilitator to clarify practices if needed, and to explore which practices resonated with the whole group. Based on this exchange, the longlist of practices was rephrased (e.g. to combine similar practices in one statement) and shortened (e.g. removing activities the CWG is doing, which were not the practices this tool aims to capture) by the facilitator. These shortlisted practices under each principle were presented back to the participants, followed by a voting session to select two practices for each governance principle. Finally, the selected governance practices were put together into a self-assessment form; a tool to be used in the self-assessment phase.

### 2. **A round of self-assessment** within each CWG

The second phase was a round of self-assessment which was done by the CWGs individually during their next CWG meeting. The tool was presented to the CWG members, and an explanation was provided on how to do the scoring. Then, the tool (a self-assessment form, Appendix 1) was handed out to the individual members. Members could score for each practice whether they apply this practice in the CWG (ranking from 1. Never, 2. Sometimes, 3. Often or 4. Always). After the scoring was done, the results were collected by the facilitator and processed using excel. From the individual scoring, average scores were calculated for each governance practice and radar charts were generated to present the average scores per CWG as well as a chart to compare the scores from the four CWGs.

See Appendix 2 for a step-by-step approach of the two phases described above.

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## 4 Results – A Food system governance self-assessment tool

The next paragraphs describe the results of 1) the development of the tool and 2) a round of self-assessment done in each CWG, including a reflection on a comparison between the four CWGs.

### 4.1 Development of the Food system governance self-assessment tool

The first phase, developing the tool itself, was done in a joint CWG learning workshop in the autumn of 2021, in which a total of 52 members from all four CWGs participated. This workshop took place in a period in which the CWGs were just started reflection and dialogue on their continuation as self-governing multistakeholder platform and their anchoring within the existing governance landscape.

From the group exercise a longlist of practices and outputs were harvested, and rephrased into the following shortlist of practices:



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**Principle and practices**

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**Suggested practices after plenary exchange, synthesis and reformulation**

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**1. Support understanding and addressing complex challenges (systems-perspective)**

- Our activities start small & focused and then expand incrementally
- Food hygiene practice
- Effective market management
- Food waste management
- Bring all wet markets under a legal framework (2009 Act by laws in terms of rules & regulations)
- Encourage data/info sharing among CWG members to better understand issues & identify gaps
- Develop a mechanism for united database creation system to understand city's challenges

- Encourage data and information sharing among CWG members to better understand issues and identify gaps
- Start our activities small and then expand incrementally
- Consider social, environmental and economic implications explicitly in the planning of our activities

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**2. Make connections between sectors and actors (boundary spanning structures)**

- Invite to every meeting: different actors and sectors
- Meet on regular basis (every 1-2months)
- Continuous support and follow up food system stakeholder
- Comprehensive team building: co-ordination, co-operation, Consultation
- Developing effective mechanism for quick communication among stakeholders
- Develop a Terms of Reference to ensure participation of relevant stakeholders

- Meet on a regular basis (every 1-2 months) and invite different actors and sectors in every meeting
- Define clear role and responsibilities of CWG members to ensure continued participation and commitment in the future
- Ensure representation from national-level government in every meeting

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**3. Provide a platform for inclusive decision-making**

- Monthly meeting, City Working Group
- Explicitly ask for every stakeholder's opinion,
- Engage all related stakeholder in CWG meeting and express their opinion
- Focus a common interest in decision making & action planning
- More migrant people & disorganized infrastructure cannot ensure access to food safety & food system
- Joint food safety campaign for capacity building at root level to national level (Community, wet market, farmers' market)
- Using extensive community platform to ensure safe food production & utilization (Urban gardening)

- Ask for every stakeholder's opinion explicitly, all opinions matter
- Focus on common interest in decision making and action planning
- Engage grassroot level stakeholders in all activities
- Ask ourselves after every meeting: who was missing? Who should we invite next time?

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**4. Adapt to local context and learn**

- Encourage Local innovations and practices
- Develop & implement pilots
- Meet local needs by doing local consultations before we plan for action
- Selecting one ward which have the highest number of restaurants
- Organize meeting with actors
- Urban Gardening
- Rooftop Gardening
- Farmers' market
- Facilitate laboratory ensuring secured food

- Encourage local innovations and practices
- Develop and implement pilots
- Meet local needs by doing local consultations before we plan for action
- Organise a learning event with other CWGs at least twice a year

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**5. Contribute to change for long-lasting impact in the food system (transformation)**

- In all activities: engage grassroot level stakeholder
- Focus on issues that are considered fundamental
- Establish small implementation groups within CWG with clear task & budget
- Clarity of division of responsibility
- Running activities must be sustained
- More field-oriented action
- In all activities include a capacity building component
- Actors sensitized
- Market linkage from producers to consumers

- Focus on issues that are considered fundamental
  - Establish small implementation groups within CWG with clear task and budget
  - Include a capacity building component in all activities
  - Develop a sustainability strategy for each activity
-

Based on the voting in the group, the following 10 governance practices were selected:

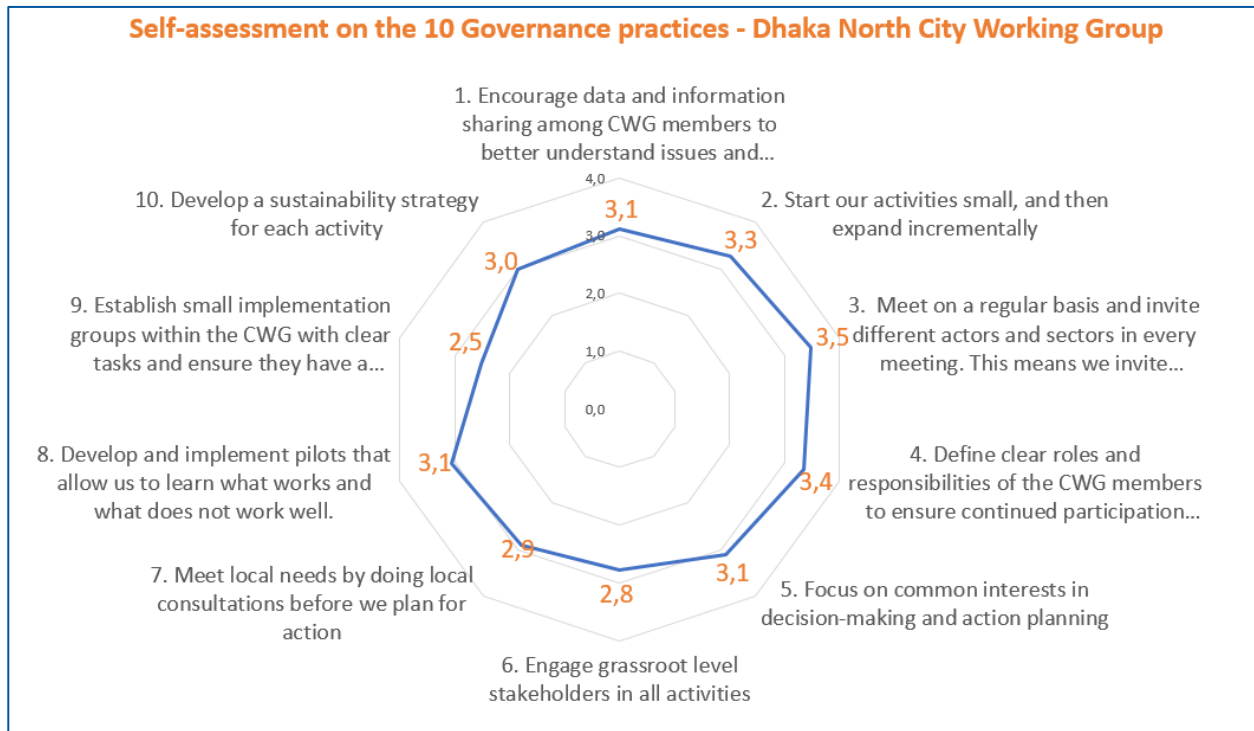
<b>Principle</b>	<b>Practice: as a CWG, we..</b>
Support understanding and addressing <b>complex challenges</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage data and information sharing among CWG members to better understand issues and identify gaps</li> <li>2. Start our activities small, and then expand incrementally</li> </ol>
Make <b>connections</b> between sectors and actors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Meet on a regular basis and invite different actors and sectors in every meeting. This means we invite actors from within the city and ensure representation of national-level government</li> <li>4. Define clear roles and responsibilities of the CWG members to ensure continued participation and commitment in the future</li> </ol>
Provide a platform for <b>inclusive</b> decision-making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Focus on common interests in decision-making and action planning</li> <li>6. Engage grassroot level stakeholders in all activities</li> </ol>
<b>Adapt</b> to local context and learn	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Meet local needs by doing local consultations before we plan for action</li> <li>8. Develop and implement pilots that allow us to learn what works and what does not work well.</li> </ol>
Contribute to change for <b>long-lasting impact</b> in the food system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Establish small implementation groups within the CWG with clear tasks and ensure they have a budget to work with</li> <li>10. Develop a sustainability strategy for each activity</li> </ol>

## 4.2 A round of self-assessment within each CWG

The round of self-assessment was done within each CWG during their next scheduled CWG meeting, which took place within two months following the development of the tool. The results of the self-assessment are described below for each CWG. Firstly, the average scoring on each practice is presented in radar charts. Secondly, a synthesis of the individual remarks – the qualitative component of the self-assessment – is provided. In this last part of the self-assessment, participants could provide a written reflection on the key strengths and needs for improvement in their CWG. The section ends with a comparison of the scoring of all four CWGs and a reflection on this.

#### 4.2.1 Dhaka North CWG

In Dhaka North, 19 CWG members were present and participated in the self-assessment. The results of the self-assessment are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Average score on each governance practice, N=19.

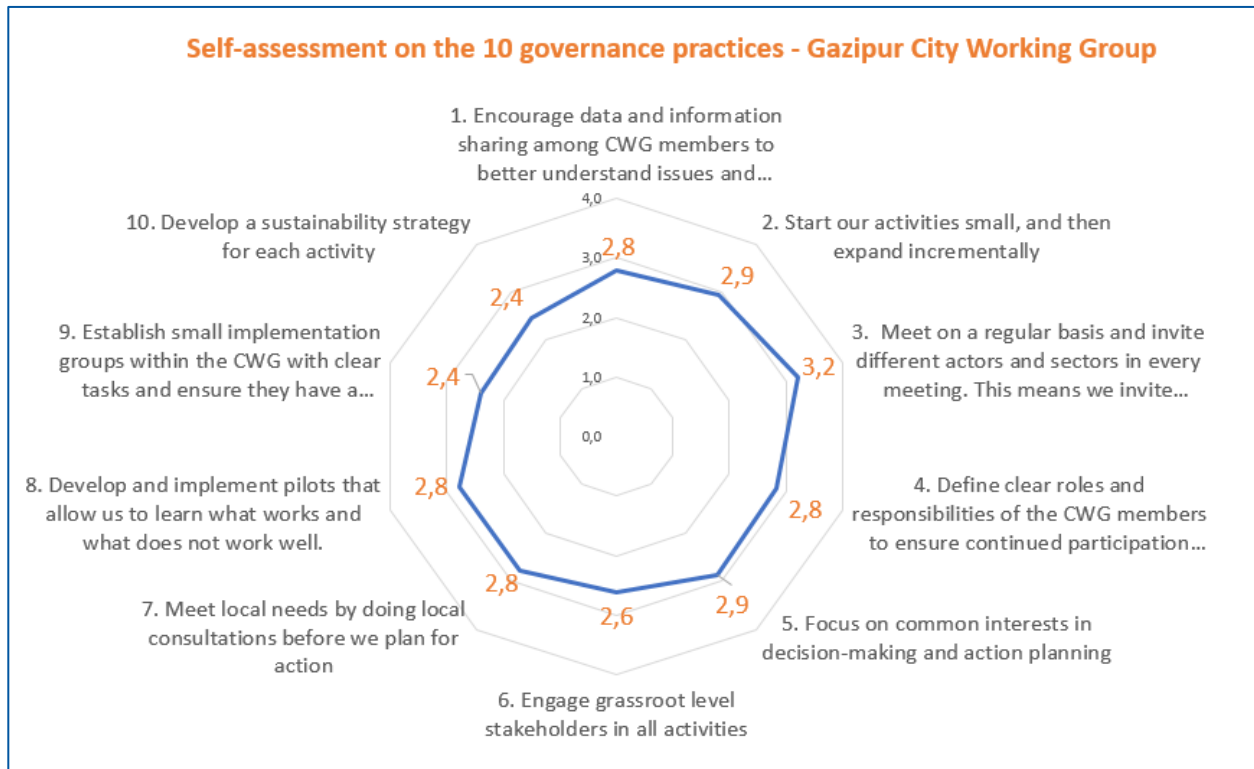
#### Synthesis of individual remarks

The biggest perceived strength of the CWG in Dhaka North, which is also reflected in the highest score, is that through regular meetings (practice 3), members are able to continuously exchange information and updates. It was also noted that the emphasis during the meetings is on information sharing rather than data sharing (practice 1). This function of the CWG as platform for information sharing was also mentioned as a benefit for the City Corporation, as this allows them to gain a better understanding of the situation, which helps them to move forward. Another strength that was mentioned is that the CWG offers a space where all members can participate in decision-making, and that these members are representing a variety of actors in Dhaka's food system (practice 3 & 5).

Yet, more attention could be given to involvement of community members in the CWG. This is indeed reflected in a slightly lower score for practice 6. Although this is not reflected in a lower score on practice 4, a need for guidelines was pointed out, where the CWG would benefit from having a clear description of roles and responsibilities and a clear approach to monitoring its activities. Finally, CWG members mentioned the need to develop more pilots and activities around key issues (e.g. waste management or food safety) that lie within the mandate of the CWG members (practice 8).

## 4.2.2 Gazipur CWG

In Gazipur, 18 CWG members were present and participated in the self-assessment. The results of the self-assessment are shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Average score on each governance practice, N=18.

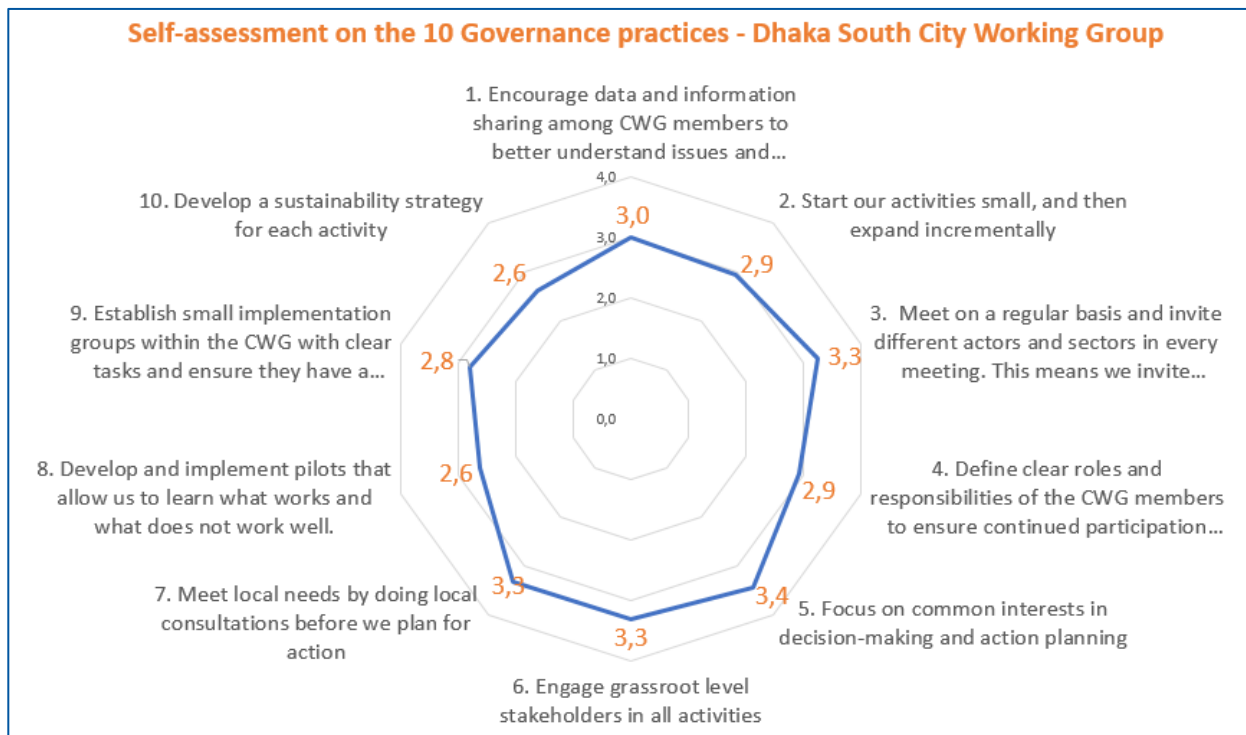
### Synthesis of individual remarks

The biggest strength perceived by this CWG is that the group makes joint decisions, and that they plan and implement activities in a participatory manner. This strength links to practice 6 on inclusive decision-making and action, which also received the highest score. Other strengths mentioned were the willingness of members to participate and take an active role in the CWG as well as the various activities the CWG implements such as rooftop gardening and farmers' markets. The latter could be linked to the practices on developing pilots (practice 8) and starting with smaller-scale activities (practice 2). Both these practices received a relatively high score.

Some needs for improvement were observed in specific activities undertaken by the group, such as establishing farmers' markets and training of food vendors. Although these activities were also mentioned as strength, a perceived need for improvement remains.

### 4.2.3 Dhaka South CWG

In Dhaka South, 18 CWG members were present and participated in the self-assessment. The results of the self-assessment are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Average score on each governance practice, N=18.

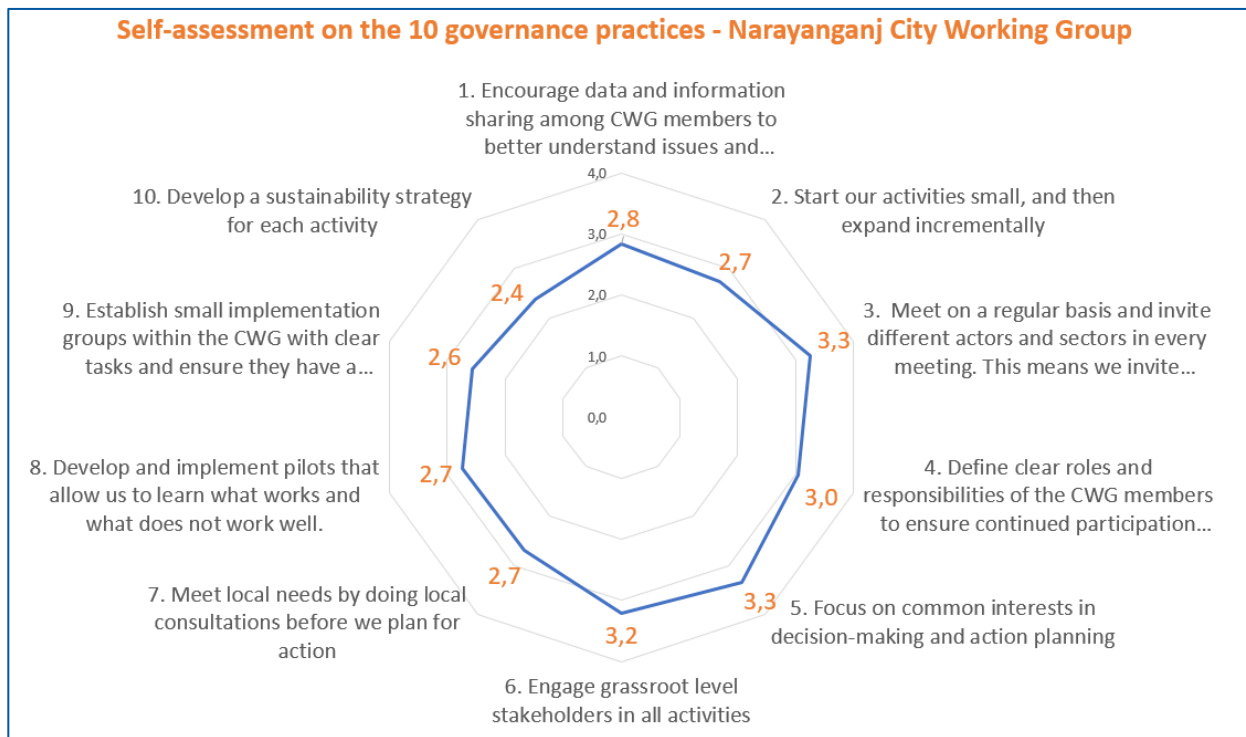
#### Synthesis of individual remarks

More than anything else, the CWG members emphasised their strength that they meet on a regular basis, which helps them to connect to each other, discuss issues that matter to them and make joint decisions (practice 3 and 5). These strengths are also reflected in the highest and second-highest scores. Members also mentioned their ability to arrive at joint action and start implementing initiatives, for example for the urban poor or the farmers’ market (linking to practice 9).

Yet, members also indicated a need to increase the visibility of their activities, and the need to carefully monitor these properly so that activities can continue in the future. These observations link to practice 8 and 10, which both scored relatively low. Not only the sustainability of the activities was mentioned, but also the continuation of the CWG itself as a prerequisite for the continuation of these activities (practice 10). A clear division of responsibilities, monitoring of activities and an action plan were also mentioned as improvements needed for the future of the CWG, which links to practice 4.

#### 4.2.4 Narayananj CWG

In Narayananj, 23 CWG members were present and participated in the self-assessment. The results of the self-assessment are shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5** Average score on each governance practice, N=23.

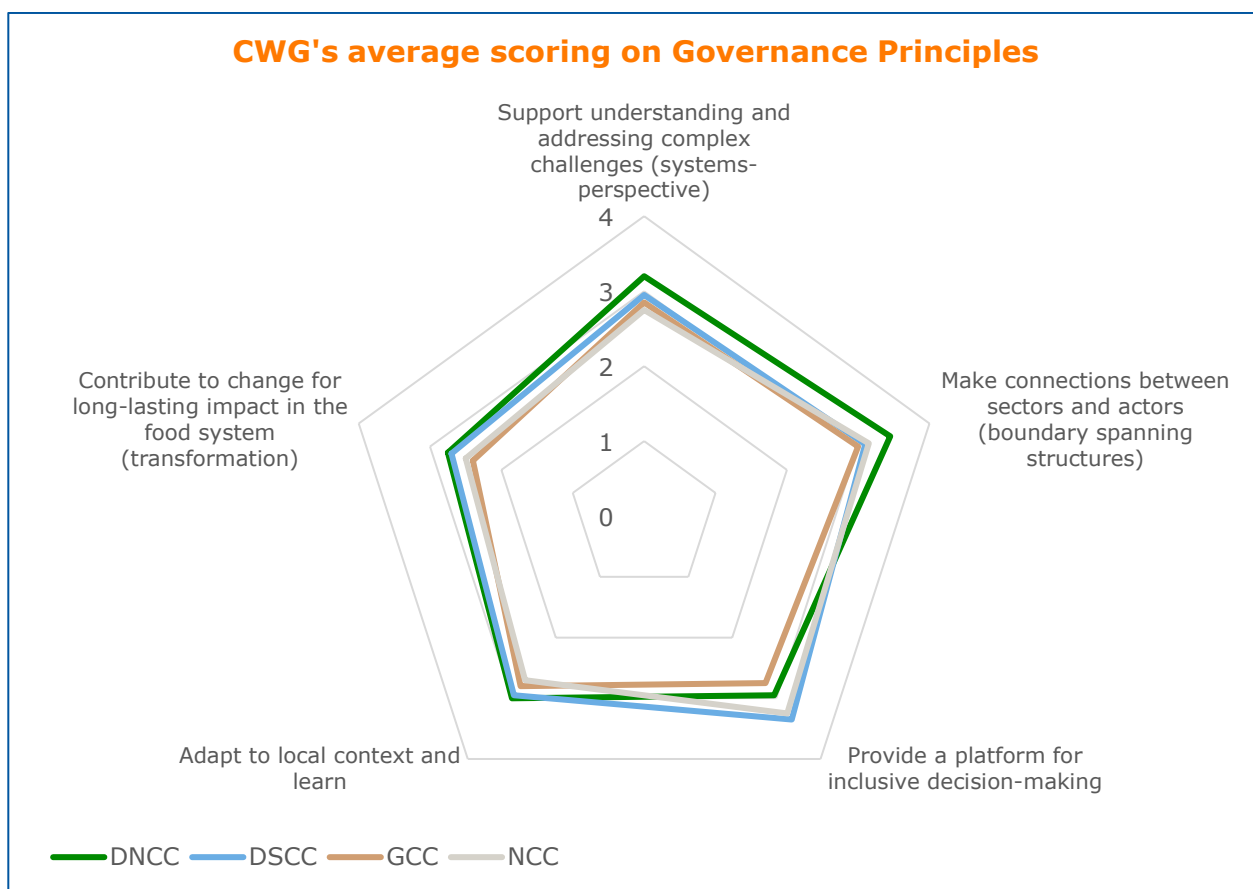
##### *Synthesis of individual remarks*

The CWG members felt that the strength of the CWG lies in their ability to meet regularly and have a variety of stakeholders around the table, including grassroots organisations and government representatives of different levels. These observations link to practice 3 and 6, which have also scored relatively high. In addition, several members mentioned their ability to collaborate which helps them to move forward in the desired direction and implement activities.

The CWG members also felt that their activity implementation could be better organised (practice 9) to ensure that their work is always up to date, that the right organisations are involved, and that their work is shared publicly to increase the visibility of the CWG. Also, the need to pay more attention to the sustainability of the activities (practice 10) was mentioned by CWG members. These practices, linked to implementation of activities and development of a sustainability strategy, are indeed scored relatively low compared to other practices.

### 4.3 Comparison between the CWGs

Below, the average scoring of the CWGs by principle are shown in Figure 6. This is the average of the two practices for each principle, presented for each CWG separately. The scoring for each CWG is presented in Table 1.



**Figure 6** Average score for each principle, by CWG.

**Table 1** Average scoring for each principle by CWG.

PRINCIPLE	Scoring			
	DNCC	DSCC	GCC	NCC
Support understanding and addressing complex challenges (systems-perspective)	3,2	3,0	2,9	2,8
Make connections between sectors and actors (boundary spanning structures)	3,5	3,1	3,0	3,2
Provide a platform for inclusive decision-making	3,0	3,4	2,8	3,3
Adapt to local context and learn	3,0	3,0	2,8	2,7
Contribute to change for long-lasting impact in the food system (transformation)	2,8	2,7	2,4	2,5

These results show that the CWGs have rather comparable scores on the different governance principles. Governance principles that score relatively high are the ones on 'supporting and understanding complex challenges', 'making connections between sectors and actors' and 'providing a platform for inclusive decision-making'. The biggest perceived strengths by all CWGs were their ability to meet on a regular basis, and to jointly discuss and decide on actions to move forward. Even though the groups shared an overall need to further strengthen and monitor these activities, they did mention their ability to arrive at joint action and the participatory nature of their decision-making.

The two principles linked to 'adapting to local context and learning', and 'contributing to long-lasting impact' received relatively lower scores from all CWGs. Practices under these principles link to how the CWGs

implement, monitor and sustain their work. Here, CWG members across all four CWGs mentioned needs to strategize for longer-term impact, for example by developing action plans, develop clear tasks and responsibilities of members, strengthen monitoring of their activities, and increase visibility of the CWG to create more impact.

These findings indicate that the CWGs are well-suited to create linkages across different stakeholders in the food system and across different (governance) levels. They also form hubs for information exchange and joint decision-making; strengths that are mentioned across all four CWGs. At the moment of self-assessment, these CWGs were operational for less than three years. In that light, these findings may indicate that the focus in this early phase is on connecting, expanding, exchanging and creating an understanding of complexities and urgencies. These were also important reasons for establishing the CWGs, where the most important aim was to bring these stakeholders in Dhaka's food system together under one umbrella. In such phase, there may be less room for strategizing for the longer term, realising transformative change, and creating space for monitoring and learning on the work that is done by the platform.



**Photo:** FAO/Fahad Abdullah Kaizer.



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## 5 Discussion and reflection

This governance tool was developed to raise awareness among the CWGs on their role as governance platform, and to support the CWGs in formulating actionable practices on how they can operate in line with guiding principles for food system governance. In addition, this tool was intended to facilitate a deeper reflection on their contribution to food system governance and a starting point for discussion on their performance and what can be improved. The following sections reflect on the findings from the development and implementation of the tool and highlight a number of methodological considerations for future adoption of the tool.

### 5.1 Reflection on findings

The process of developing and implementing this new Food system governance self-assessment tool in itself already achieved part of the objectives. In this process, the CWGs' awareness on the concept of governance was raised, including their role in food system governance. This process also provided dedicated space for reflection and learning on what governance means to them and what governance practices they wish to strive for, making 'governance' a tangible and actionable concept.

Throughout the process, it seemed that participants grew into the topic, realising that a joint reflection on how they wish to operate is a way to connect and support each other as CWG. The tool provided a common approach to governance, shared language and a concrete translation of what governance meant to them and their day-to-day practice. This made the governance monitoring tool a boundary spanning structure in itself, bringing the CWGs together and allowing them to engage in joint reflection and learning cycles over time.

This tool also aimed to support self-monitoring of the CWGs and strengthen CWGs' contributions to food system governance. At this point it is too early to draw conclusions on this, because the self-monitoring value will only become visible when the tool is adopted regularly over time. In addition, an important step that was not done in this process was to create space for joint reflection on the results of the self-assessment. Based on these reflections, CWGs could then formulate joint action to improve their governance practices. Due to time constraints this step was not feasible.

### 5.2 Methodological considerations

#### 5.2.1 Formulation of governance practices

Despite efforts to introduce the concept of 'food system governance' at the beginning, the concept seemed to remain rather abstract, and moving towards a more reflective mindset on the concept was challenging. This became visible in the formulation of governance practices. The CWGs are largely driven by a sense of urgency and the need to arrive at joint action in their cities. However, this exercise required them to reflect on how they operate as a platform. Participants were inclined to formulate activities they felt they should do or improve (e.g. implement farmers' markets, or train street food vendors), rather than zooming out to reflect on how they operate and what their role is in the wider context of their cities' food system (e.g. connect different stakeholders, or facilitate deeper understanding of key issues). During the group exchange on the longlist of practices, the facilitator needed to keep asking probing questions to invite participants to a deeper reflection on underlying processes and practices.

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## 5.2.2 Self-assessment

Looking at the scoring, on average not much distinction between the practices could be observed. Although the results vary per CWG, the average scores turned out within a rather narrow range, while in numerous cases the individual scores ranged between never and always. Reflection on the results of the self-assessment would be needed to identify and discuss internal variation within each CWG. In addition, to create a stronger distinction between the practices in future assessments, a wider scale (e.g. 1-10) could be considered, or participants could be asked to divide a fixed number of points over the 10 practices in an unequal manner. These alternative approaches need further testing.

The self-assessments also showed a rather positive scoring on almost all practices. This may reflect a self-serving bias in which members are more likely to attribute positive behaviour towards themselves. One reason could be that the CWGs fulfil an urgent need to better coordinate and align around food systems issues. This achievement in itself could create an overall positive stance towards the performance of the CWGs. Alternatively, these scores may partially reflect a wish rather than a current situation, and therefore turn out towards the positive side of the balance. In future exercises, it may be helpful to more strongly encourage participants to be honest and reassure that a lower score could simply refer to a wish to embrace new practices or strengthen existing ones. Another option to be considered is to ask an external party to fill in the assessment for the CWG, to make this tool an external as well as a self-assessment tool.

## 5.2.3 Time and time constraints

An important observation in this process is that time constraints often affected the room to reflect on and jointly discuss results, especially during the round of self-assessment. Due to time constraints, only personal reflections were captured on the self-assessment form and no plenary reflection could take place. However, more time could add two important components to the tool:

1. Sense-making of results and reflection on their meaning.

A joint discussion of the results within each CWG could help identify variations in individual scoring and help identify different interpretations of certain practices. Such discussion could point out needs for further refinement or reformulation of specific practices. In addition, discussion of the results may help to uncover different opinions and experiences and allow for dialogue to bring individual views together and build understanding among the CWG members.

More time would also allow for reflection on what the results of the self-assessment mean to the CWG members. Questions that could guide such a round of reflection are "what is striking about the results?", "do we find these results desirable, and why (not)?", or "which practices do we adopt well, which ones not? And what factors contribute to this?". Such reflections can help identify underlying factors that contribute to the success of the CWG, create room to zoom out on the role and CWG in the city's food system, and point towards room for further improvement.

2. Formulation of goals or actions to improve contribution to food system governance.

Following from these reflections, additional time is recommended for the CWGs to formulate concrete actions or goals that help them to further consolidate strengths and address potential weaknesses. After this round of self-assessment, these actions could contribute to continuity and anchoring of the CWGs and help them plan for sustainability of the activities they currently implement. Such actions and goals can be revisited over time and new goals may emerge as the CWGs adopt this tool frequently. As such, the Food system governance self-assessment tool can function as a monitoring tool for the CWG to track their contribution to food system governance over time, as well as a tool that helps strengthening food system governance in their cities.

A lack of time is a known issue in many MSPs. While being driven by common goals or a sensation of urgency, time to reflect and learn is not easily prioritized. Yet, time for learning and reflection is key especially for platforms such as the CWGs that operate in highly dynamic and complex environments (Van Mierlo et al. 2010). To strike a good balance between reflection and action requires strong facilitation and time management skills of convenors (Dozois et al. 2010). In this process of developing and implementing the tool, the role of the facilitators was key and therefore it is recommended to appoint a facilitator also in future adoption of the tool.

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## 6 Way forward

These reflections together point to a number of steps that can be taken from here.

**For the CWGs in Dhaka it is recommended to:**

- **Adopt this tool more regularly to enhance reflection and learning on their performance.**

A repetition of this exercise can help shed light on how the CWGs are applying these practices over time, where their strengths lie in their contribution to governance of their city's food system and where they can strengthen their contribution.

- **Formulate concrete goals and actions based on self-assessment.**

Based on the results of the self-assessment, the CWG are encouraged to reflect on why they implement certain practices well, and why other practices are more difficult to apply. Based on their reflections they can formulate concrete goals that can help them to sustain strong practices and strengthen weaker ones.

- **Use these insights to develop a CWG anchoring strategy.**

Having insights in how the CWG would like to operate (i.e. which practices they wish to uphold), and what their goals are as a platform, can be a helpful starting point for their own anchoring strategy. This tool, including dedicated reflection on the results and goals derived from that, can help the CWGs to sharpen their vision, and clarify their tasks, responsibilities and mandate.

**Other cities (in- and outside Bangladesh), or similar multistakeholder governance platforms,** can use this tool as a starting point for reflection and learning on their own role in the larger system, and to make the concept of 'governance' actionable. This tool can also help those platforms to monitor and strengthen their own contribution to (food system) governance. In addition, this tool can offer an inspiring example for such platforms to develop their own governance self-assessment tool, using a similar step-by-step approach and thereby adapt the tool to their own unique context.



**Photo:** WUR/Lotte Roosendaal.

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# Appendix 1 Food system governance self-assessment tool

Self-assessment on governance practices								
Of which CWG are you a member?								
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">DNCC</td> <td style="width: 25%;">DSCC</td> <td style="width: 25%;">GCC</td> <td style="width: 25%;">NCC</td> </tr> </table>					DNCC	DSCC	GCC	NCC
DNCC	DSCC	GCC	NCC					
Governance principle	Governance practices: in our CWG, we...	How often does your CWG apply this practice?						
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Always			
<b>Support understanding and addressing complex challenges</b> (systems-perspective)	1. Encourage data and information sharing among CWG members to better understand issues and identify gaps							
	2. Start our activities small, and then expand incrementally							
<b>Make connections between sectors and actors</b> (boundary spanning structures)	3. Meet on a regular basis and invite different actors and sectors in every meeting. This means we invite actors from within the city and ensure representation of national-level government							
	4. Define clear roles and responsibilities of the CWG members to ensure continued participation and commitment in the future							
<b>Provide a platform for inclusive decision-making</b>	5. Focus on common interests in decision-making and action planning							
	6. Engage grassroot level stakeholders in all activities							
<b>Adapt to local context and learn</b>	7. Meet local needs by doing local consultations before we plan for action							
	8. Develop and implement pilots that allow us to learn what works and what does not work well.							
<b>Contribute to change for long-lasting impact in the food system</b> (transformation)	9. Establish small implementation groups within the CWG with clear tasks and ensure they have a budget to work with							
	10. Develop a sustainability strategy for priority activities. That means that in the planning for these activities we organise for financial resources, human resources and other necessary resources that can ensure continuation of activities in the long-term.							
<b>Which practice do you feel the CWG is particularly doing well? Why?</b>								
<b>Which practice could particularly use some improvement? Why?</b>								

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# Appendix 2 Step-by-approach

## Phase 1: Development of the Food system governance self-assessment tool

<b>Setting:</b>	A joint exercise as part of a CWG learning workshop with representatives from all four CWG members together
<b>Facilitation:</b>	A main facilitator and group facilitators
<b>Time:</b>	1h 30min

- **Preparation:** The five governance principles were rephrased into a more accessible language, inspired by the findings from the case study Roosendaal et al. (2022) on how these principles become visible in the CWGs.
- **Step 1:** The rephrased principles were presented to the CWGs. In groups of 6-7 people, participants were asked to think about practices (actions) that they felt were fitting with each of the principles.
- **Step 2:** Each group selected 1 practice that they felt was most relevant for each principle and presented this in plenary. All practices for each principle were harvested on a wall.
- **Step 3:** In plenary, proposed practices were grouped, and commonalities and highlights were pointed out by the facilitator.
- **Step 4:** Based on the input from the groups and the plenary discussion, the facilitators rephrased or synthesised some practices, arriving at 3 to 4 proposed practices for each principle.
- **Step 5:** These practices were presented to the groups, followed by a voting session within each group to select the two most essential practices for each principle.
- **Step 6:** Based on the voting, 10 governance practices were selected – 2 per governance principle.
- **Step 7:** Development of the Food system governance self-assessment tool, based on the 10 selected practices (Appendix 1), then translated to Bangla.

## Phase 2: A round of self-assessment

<b>Setting:</b>	CWG meeting in each of the four City Corporations
<b>Facilitation:</b>	One main facilitator
<b>Time:</b>	30 minutes

- **Step 1:** The results from the learning workshop were shared in each CWG, showing the 10 selected principles.
- **Step 2:** The tool (a self-assessment form) was handed out to each CWG member to score how often they applied these practices in their CWG and to share an individual reflection on their scoring.
- **Step 3:** The facilitator harvested all self-assessment forms and scored the responses to create a radar chart for each CWG separately, showing the average scores for each practice. Thereby scoring was done as follows: Always = 4, Often = 3, Sometimes = 2, Never = 1.

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