Food systems policy processes

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at four food systems policy baseline assessments conducted in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia as part of the Food Systems for Healthier Diets Flagship of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH). The assessments were carried out to provide a snapshot of the countries' policy contexts around food systems, including the views and perceptions of policymakers and key actors in different domains relevant to the countries' food systems. All four reports used a mixed-methods design and a common conceptual framework to identify food systems related stakeholders, narratives, and power relationships around policies, practices, and regulations at the time of the research.

The objective of this summary report was twofold.

Firstly, it aimed to reflect on the particular conceptual framework and methodology applied in the studies to assess policy processes related to food systems. The framework drew on three broad strands of literature on post-structuralist, actor-oriented, and political interest approaches, all aimed at understanding complex policy processes, such as the ones surrounding food and nutrition. The report analyzes what components of the conceptual map the four policy baseline assessments used, what they excluded, and how much information they could gain through the framework's application. It also highlights the consequences of the different choices made during the research projects. The paper concludes that there is potential in the conceptual framework for food systems policy process analysis and outlines some recommendations for future research.

The second aim of the paper was to take an inventory of the reports' findings and identify commonalities and differences between the food systems policy areas researched in the four countries. The paper argues that the focus of policymakers and important food systems actors has broadened to include many other issue areas than the more traditional ones (such as agricultural production). However, consideration for all parts of the food systems (including key food systems outcomes, namely food and nutrition security, environmental and socio-economic outcomes, and the trade-offs and synergies among them) is still seemingly lacking.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

A4NH	CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health
ADI	Actors, discourses and interests
BASK	Beliefs, attitudes, skills and knowledge
CSO	Civil society organization
FSHD	Food Systems for Healthier Diets
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
INGO	International non-governmental organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

With the COVID 19 pandemic exposing the vulnerability of our food systems, the high-level commitments made by stakeholders to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may seem to be less attainable than ever. The current trends in food security and nutrition around the world are far from ideal. According to the most recent estimations, "the high cost of healthy diets and persistently high levels of poverty and income inequality continue to keep healthy diets out of reach for around 3 billion people in every region of the world" (FAO et al., 2021, p. vi).

However, the negative trends do not deter optimism that we can address the fragilities of food systems and build back better. In September 2021, food systems actors assembled at the first United Nations Food Systems Summit, pledging continued commitment to achieving the SDGs and gearing up to combat the effect of the pandemic. To equip them to succeed in the Decade of Action, answering the question of how to actually change food systems is more pressing than ever.

To enable resilient, sustainable and inclusive food systems, better food systems policies are urgently needed. However, policy processes are complex phenomena, and to help us understand policy processes, we need to widen the range of the currently available tools. To contribute to this research area, while uncovering the complex dynamics behind the existing policies related to food systems issues in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, a comprehensive policy baseline assessment following an actors-discourses-interests (ADI) framework was carried out in each country. The research was undertaken for the Food Systems for Healthier Diets (FSHD) Flagship implemented as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH).

The ambition of this report is to draw lessons from the experiences and findings of the research projects and assess if using a combination of different analytical perspectives helps us better understand policy processes and spaces for intervention.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

POLICY PROCESSES AND THE FOOD SYSTEMS APPROACH

Before delving into the dynamics of policy processes and the approach used by the three reports, it is important to clarify some of the basic definitions behind policy, policy processes, and food systems.

Crabbé and Leroy (2008) distinguish three views on **policy:** one that views policy as a goal-oriented rational-synoptic process, one that views policy as political interaction, and one that views policy as an institutional phenomenon.

The **policy process** has been defined either as a linear process, from emergence to evaluation (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009; Jordan & Adelle, 2012) or as a circular process (Crabbé & Leroy, 2008). The process usually is conceptualized to consist of the following stages (DeGroff & Cargo, 2009; Jordan & Adelle, 2012):

1. Problem emergence
2. Agenda setting
3. Consideration of policy options
4. Decision making
5. Implementation
6. Evaluation
7. Maintenance, succession, or termination

According to HLPE 2020, policies related to food and nutrition security should be approached within a sustainable **food systems approach**. While a number of conceptualizations exist for the food systems approach, the core characteristics attributed to food systems per se are relatively persistent. A food system

> gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socioeconomic and environmental outcomes (HLPE, 2017, p. 11).

According to the HLPE framework, also used by A4NH, food systems consist of three elements, namely food supply chains, food environments, and consumer behavior (HLPE, 2017), and five drivers that affect the elements and vice versa. These five drivers are biophysical and environmental drivers; innovation, technology, and infrastructure drivers; political and economic drivers; socio-cultural drivers; and demographic drivers (HLPE, 2017). Food systems outcomes can be categorized as food and nutrition security, socioeconomic and environmental outcomes (Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019).

Bortoletti and Lomax (2019) argue that a food systems approach to policymaking and implementation should consider the following five principles: i) focus on long-term outcomes, ii) include food consumption as a driver, iii) facilitate platforms of collaboration among food systems actors, iv) address emerging trends and challenges, and v) promote a common narrative and approach across relevant bodies or ministries.

CONCEPTUAL MAP FOR UNDERSTANDING POLICY PROCESSES

Policies are often built on problematic assumptions and unquestioned problem definitions. When policies keep failing to achieve their set goals, it may be needed to move beyond questioning the *policies* themselves towards analyzing the *processes* that resulted in them. According to Keeley and

Scoones (1999), policy analysis may only have little usefulness if certain forces during policymaking—such as path dependence and powerful interests—keep leading the process to the same solutions and outcomes over and over. To enable the analysis and ultimately the transformation of policy processes, we need to understand the dynamics surrounding the relationship between knowledge and policy: first, how and why particular types of knowledge are embraced by and get to dominate a particular policy, and secondly, in what ways could alternative forms of knowledge be included during the processes (Keeley & Scoones, 1999).

In order to uncover why certain policies come to life, how they change or remain unchanged and what can be done to change them, Keeley and Scoones (1999) draw on perspectives from diverse disciplinary areas debating the policy process and policy change. Based on an extensive review of the rich literature, they identified three strands of approaches to policy processes and policy change:

1) Post-structuralist approach (policy narratives)
2) Actor-oriented approach (actors & networks)
3) Political interest approach (politics & interests)

Their contribution to understanding complex policy processes stems from showing the power of integrating these three approaches instead of prioritizing one over the others. We will now look into each of these themes.

ACTORS & NETWORKS

The literature around this approach aims to uncover how small practices and actions of a number of interacting actors lead to the spread of certain knowledge. There are four broad approaches within this literature that Keeley and Scoones (1999) refer to as 'actors and interfaces,' 'actor-network theory,' 'epistemic communities,' and 'policy entrepreneurs.'

Actors and interfaces

This view emphasizes the importance of the expression of agency through the choices and discretion of individual actors and through their actions and repeated practices while acknowledging their social embeddedness in networks and cultural settings (Keeley & Scoones, 1999). It also gives special attention to interfaces that can occur among the different actors "as they go about their work" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 20). This can manifest through interactions among diverse stakeholders, potentially resulting in the acquisition of more in-depth insights.

Actor-network theory

Keeley and Scoones (1999) identify two critical features of this approach, namely i) "an emphasis on the micro-detail of how particular networks—encompassing both human and non-human actors—get established" and ii) emphasis "on the ways in which the process of establishing actor-networks is simultaneously a process of establishing knowledge" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 20).

This theory goes beyond looking at only the individuals involved in the processes (who) and also explores the different instruments they use in the process of establishing knowledge, such as journals, conferences, policy documents, meetings, workshops, field trips, programs, schemes, research studies, projects, demonstrations, exposure visits, etc. As such, the question is not just *who* spreads the knowledge but also *how* knowledge is spread by them. How does a particular piece of information or theory from a certain actor or network move through "chains of persuasion and influence" (Keeley

& Scoones, 1999, p. 20) to advance a specific argument while enrolling new people into their networks?

Epistemic communities & policy entrepreneurs

The concept of epistemic communities refers to "networks of individuals sharing core […] beliefs about the subject area" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 21), and the concept of policy entrepreneurs refers to "key actors in the policy process whose aim is to push policy in particular ways through the mobilization of knowledge and expertise in particular ways" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 21). This latter type of actors usually invest considerable efforts in creating their own networks of influence.

While each of these above-mentioned theories looks at actors from a different perspective, uniting all of them is the crucial understanding that actors actively spread, maintain, reinforce, suppress and change narratives (i.e., formulations of certain types of knowledge) through their practices.

DISCOURSES & POLICY NARRATIVES

This post-structuralist approach holds that it is important to be aware of the way policy issues are defined and talked about—including the language used to describe one's assumptions—as concepts are inherently value-laden, have their histories, and "reflect types of knowledge" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 25). A discourse is a "specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (Hajer, 1995, p. 44).

Policy narratives can be viewed as stories about policy change that consist of a beginning, a middle, and an end (IDS, 2006). Consequently, policy narratives define problems, explain their origin or their root causes, and suggest solutions to overcome the challenges. By doing so, they determine what is included and what alternative interpretations are excluded, empowering certain institutions and individuals in the process while marginalizing others (Keeley & Scoones, 1999). Discourses in politics are often simplified to make problems seem more manageable and understandable. Ultimately, appealing discourses could become dominant in shaping certain policy decisions over others, and some may even get stuck for an extended period of time (IDS, 2006).

POLITICS & INTERESTS

According to this strand of literature, policy is inherently political and value-laden (Keeley & Scoones, 1999). As such, it sees policy change as "the upshot of interactions between different groups with differing political interests" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 14). Knowledge, beliefs, and action exist as merely a reflection of interests and thus are subordinate to them (Keeley & Scoones, 1999).

Some of the literature focuses on bargaining, competition, and conflict between groups in society (society-centered/pluralist accounts), while others pay particular attention to the role of the state and its agencies in shaping policies (state-centered accounts). Often special consideration is given to bureaucratic politics, noting the inherently political nature of implementation, with competition among and within ministries, bureaus, and agencies across different scales over control and resources being prevalent. Consequently, the executive arm of the government is not viewed as a neutral and objective implementer of policies but is recognized to possess considerable agency and influence on how the instructions get implemented. The literature on 'policy communities and networks' attempts to bring together the aforementioned strands, arguing that

Each policy domain […] needs to be looked at empirically to see whether the state is weak or strong in this or that area, how bureaucratic interactions might work and how different social forces might be able to shape a policy (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 18).

This approach holds that certain forms of knowledge are more prevalent and influential because the groups with interest in them have won either through open competition, keeping issues off the agenda, or through ensuring marginalized people remained unaware of their interests (Keeley & Scoones, 1999).

SYNTHESIS

The synthesis of these aforementioned themes can provide a multi-faceted analysis of knowledge, policy, and power in policy processes, especially when facing complicated problem areas. One of the reasons the IDS research chose to explore the combination of these three approaches when looking at environmental policy processes is because environmental problems are complex, unpredictable, are subject to uncertainty, operate across a number of scales, and are influenced by a large number of actors (IDS, 2006). Food and nutrition security problems can also be categorized as such and are similarly challenging to deal with, making the approach promising to uncover deeper dynamics behind its related policy processes.

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

All four studies used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through two instruments: i) face-to-face open-ended interviews and ii) a semi-quantitative online survey. The primary data was complemented by secondary data, such as peer-reviewed articles and grey literature. Prior to the start of the data collection, consultations were held with a select number of key actors in order to identify key issue areas that were perceived as crucial to the four countries' food systems. These issue areas were then used to guide the formulation of the questions for both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys. In all three cases, respondents were identified through purposive sampling.

Face-to-face interviews: The face-to-face open-ended interviews were inspired by the previously explored conceptual map, using a combination of the three analytical lenses in order to explore the narratives, actors, and power relationships behind the policies related to food systems in the three countries. The reports refer to the framework as the actors-discourses-interests (ADI) framework, and the question guides aimed to uncover the

i)   main actors & institutions involved in food system-related issues (A);
ii)   areas of convergence and divergence in the position of those actors (A);
iii)   main challenges related to the issue areas and their corresponding solutions according to the different actors (D); and
iv)   underlying power dynamics (I) (Pham et al., 2018).

The interview guides used in Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia were almost identical (besides the slight contextualization), while the one used in Nigeria differed in its approach. For the question guide used in Vietnam, please refer to appendix 1, and for the question guide used in Nigeria, please refer to appendix 2.

Online survey: The surveys conducted in Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia used a closed 1–7 Likert scale, while the survey conducted in Nigeria used a closed 1–5 Likert scale. The questions focused on the beliefs, attitudes, skills, and knowledge (BASK) of the respondents and were formulated based on psychometric techniques requiring self-evaluation.

VIETNAM

Before the data collection, during a preliminary workshop, nine key food systems stakeholders identified five key issues in Vietnam's and Hanoi's food systems. The selected issues are i) urbanization, ii) climate change, iii) food safety, iv) food trade policy, and v) agro-biodiversity.

Primary data was collected through field research between August and September 2017.

Respondents included government officials, private sector actors, civil society and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, and technical experts. A total of 37 experts were interviewed, and 91 participated in the online survey, with an equal distribution of expertise across the five issue areas.

BANGLADESH

The first step in the research process consisted of a brainstorming session with ten key experts—including academics, policy planners, and food systems practitioners—on 4 February 2017. The

stakeholders identified the following five key issues: i) food and nutrition security, ii) land and water use, iii) climate change, iv) urbanization, and v) agro-marketing and value chain.

The field research for primary data collection was conducted between April and June 2018.

Respondents included actors from the government, private sector, civil society and NGOs, development partners, researchers, and technical experts. The face-to-face interviews attracted 25 key informants. The researchers noted difficulties with obtaining responses for the online survey. While initially 280 respondents were invited to participate, only 104 respondents filled in the survey after numerous follow-ups from the researchers. It has been noted that online surveys were a novelty in Bangladesh.

NIGERIA

The first stage of the research process consisted of a literature review followed by consultations with a few selected stakeholders to identify relevant issues of food systems related policies. As a result of the literature review and consultations, the following four issue areas were identified: i) food and nutrition security, ii) land and water use, iii) climate change, and iv) agro-marketing and value chain.

Primary data was collected through field research between November and December 2018.

Researchers interviewed 25 key informants, and 100 key informants participated in the online surveys and included government officials, private sector actors, national research organizations, civil society and NGO representatives, think tanks, development partners, and technical experts.

ETHIOPIA

One hundred respondents participated in the online surveys, and 54 in the face-to-face interviews. The key informant interviews were conducted at both the national and regional levels. The respondents included actors from government institutions, NGOs, UN agencies, academia, and research organizations.

During a brainstorming session with experts relevant to food systems, the following areas were suggested to be included as part of the key informant interviews: i) food and nutrition policy, ii) food safety policy, iii) Seqota Declaration. Due to the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic, interviews were mostly conducted telephonically.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

VIETNAM

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, SKILLS, AND KNOWLEDGE

The first part of the report discusses i) the knowledge, engagement, skills, and capacities of the respondents with regards to the food systems agenda, ii) if the food systems policy agenda supported healthy diets, iii) whether evidence or lobbying had a larger impact on the agenda, and iv) the drivers of the agenda.

According to the report, respondents affiliated with food safety, agrobiodiversity, or trade viewed their knowledge and the knowledge of their colleagues within their own institutions as satisfactory. They also maintained a higher level of engagement with food systems debates and expressed confidence in their understanding of food systems issues and their skills and capacities. On the other hand, while urbanization and climate change experts also reported satisfactory personal and institutional knowledge related to the food systems debate, they reported a lower level of engagement than the other groups of experts and believed that their skills and capacities were insufficient to tackle food systems issues.

Respondents felt that the current situation was unsatisfactory with regards to the healthiness of the food systems in Vietnam, with consumer trust in food safety scoring the lowest, followed by the accessibility of healthy food by poor urban households. They were split on whether evidence or lobbying had a more substantial impact on the policy agenda, but they seemed to agree that the food systems policy agenda poorly reflects the reality on the ground.

The utmost pressing issue singled out by the majority of the respondents was food safety and water quality, followed by food processing and distributions and environmental health.

ACTORS, NARRATIVES, INTERESTS: KEY ISSUE AREAS

1 Urbanization policy and food systems

Respondents identified 21 actors, with the majority being public and political institutions.

The report identified two framing narratives related to urbanization: the issues related to the *physical process* of urbanization and the issues related to the *governance and decision-making process* around urbanization and their corresponding impacts on the actors and dimensions of food systems. According to the findings, the former types of issues were often suggested to be resolved through *technical* solutions, while the latter kind of issues through *political* solutions. Furthermore, the report noted that often policy issues related to urbanization would spill over to different sectors from where they originated, specifically to the environment and food/diet domains. The findings suggested that to overcome the different issues affecting urbanization, the different ministries needed to move away from the prevalent siloed approach and improve collaboration, along with embracing cross-sectoral planning.

As for the power dynamics, the ones most influential in the policy processes and in planning (mostly government officials) were found to considerably differ from those implementing the plans (e.g., party leaders, local elites, big firms). Hanoi residents were believed to have only limited power to contribute to the policy processes, which they mainly exerted through social media.

2 Climate change

Respondents identified 13 actors, with the vast majority being government institutions.

According to the report, the issues identified by the respondents mostly related to poor governance (for example, poor communication and collaboration among ministries, siloed approach), and not to the impact of climate change per se. It was also mentioned that local level actors did not possess the necessary resources, capacity, and expertise to tackle climate change. Furthermore, the spillover of the issues was not easy to delineate as in other cases. Therefore, the authors argued that the relation between climate change and food systems is poorly comprehended and established among the different stakeholders.

According to the report, the policy processes are dominated by governmental institutions, with the third sector representatives possessing some influence as well. Small-scale farmers and vulnerable groups are mostly excluded, while the private sector seems to be absent from the processes.

3 Food safety

According to the report, the respondents mentioned 24 key actors, with plenty of government institutions, but also several private sector and civil society actors.

The narratives related to food safety issues can also be presented as a combination of technical and political issues, ranging from low capacity to reinforce regulations to poor coordination. They also show a strong association between matters of food safety and agricultural production.

While the influence of central authorities is very strong in food safety issues, diverse actors have influence in this issue area from all the different sectors, including the media.

4 Food trade policy

According to the report, the respondents identified 24 key actors regarding trade policy and food systems, which includes a lot of government institutions but also several private sector and civil society actors.

As with the other cases, the issues identified in the country related to trade and food systems can be categorized as technical and political, and they spill over to the food safety and agriculture domains. A key technical issue highlighted by the respondents concerns the lack of quality control on imported and domestic products, with particular attention to raw feed, which raises a number of food safety concerns. To solve the issue, clearer technical standards and regulations for raw materials were suggested. A key political issue raised by the respondents concerns the negotiations with the World Trade Organization regarding trade liberalization versus the protection of certain sectors, in which Vietnam's objective is to protect its producers from cheap imported products.

As for power dynamics, while respondents recognize the government's central role, they also highlight the private sector as an important domain in relation to trade policy and food systems. On the other hand, small-scale producers, processors, and sellers, along with consumers, are perceived to have the least influence.

5 Agro-biodiversity

The respondents identified 30 actors influencing and engaging with agro-biodiversity and food systems, many of which possess specific technical expertise, and with the vast majority coming from government institutions.

One of the main narratives identifies the lack of capacity to enforce regulations on pesticides and chemicals resulting in noncompliance, coupled with the increasing prevalence of agricultural intensification as major issues leading to severe environmental degradation. Respondents also noted the issue of balancing the needs of the country's economy with protecting the environment as a crucial concern. Many of the issues noted for agrobiodiversity were also linked to the domains of agriculture and food/diets.

Respondents named the central authorities as the most influential actors and government-based institutes and conservation NGOs as somewhat influential. They identified consumers and small-scale producers as possessing the least power.

BANGLADESH

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, SKILLS, AND KNOWLEDGE

Respondents identified food system and water equity, nutrition, and food processing and distribution as the three most important food systems issues in Bangladesh. While the majority of respondents felt their personal engagement was low to medium in food system policy discussions, more than half of the respondents considered their institution's level of engagement as high. On the other hand, respondents felt that their personal level of understanding was on the higher side. Still, they found their institutions' level of knowledge to be on the lower side, with the exception of the government actors, who felt their institutional knowledge was also on the higher end. Aside from the government actors, most respondents felt that cooperation between government agencies on food systems issues was on the lower side. Respondents felt that advocacy and lobbying influenced the food policy agenda to a low to medium extent and that policies were relatively aligned with on the ground realities.

Regarding the previously mentioned five issue areas, respondents noted that both their institutions and them personally were moderately involved in discussions and dialogues related to these specific areas, and both also possessed a certain level of knowledge about the issue areas.

ACTORS, NARRATIVES, INTERESTS: KEY ISSUE AREAS

1 Food and nutrition security policies

According to the report, the majority of the respondents regarded food and nutrition security policies as the result of a collaborative effort across a variety of actors. However, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the Ministry of Agriculture were singled out as significant champions by some respondents. As for the role of the different stakeholders, most of the respondents believed that government stakeholders were responsible for the development and implementation of food and nutrition security policies, rules, and regulations. They regarded the role of donors and development partners as being responsible for allocating resources along with executing projects through designated NGOs.

The report highlighted a number of challenges Bangladesh is facing in terms of its food and nutrition security. These could be grouped as challenges related to environmental, agricultural, socio-political and economic, and nutrition-related issues. According to the findings of the report, Bangladesh's current problems stem from its poor geographical features that limit crop production to rice, coupled with the lack of scientific and commercial cultivation, along with a lack of agricultural investment by poor peasants, resulting in subpar agricultural production. Furthermore, the ineffective enforcement of laws, regulations, and codes of conduct aimed at preventing unhealthy food in the markets, along with the lack of public awareness about healthy diets, also contributed to the prevailing situation. To overcome these challenges, a number of solutions were noted. These include food supply chain interventions, interventions targeting consumer behavior and diets, infrastructural, political, economic, and market interventions, along with solutions to address environmental issues. Finally, improving the economy, governance, and social protection were also recommended by the respondents.

As for the power relations in this domain, small-scale producers or businessmen (e.g., fishermen and small poultry farmers) are particularly vulnerable against actors with more resources or connections (e.g., fake fishermen, feed suppliers, cigarette manufacturing companies, millers, and wholesalers).

2 Impact of land and water use policies on food systems

According to the report, the respondents identified a number of government bodies, NGOs, donors, and developments partners as key actors and networks. No champion has been singled out, and the agenda was believed to be set through the collaboration of the relevant actors and networks. Furthermore, NGOs sharing similar views, along with a fishermen's cooperative was also observed.

The report highlighted a number of challenges Bangladesh is facing in terms of its land and water use policies, such as unplanned urbanization, industrialization, and infrastructure development, climate change, agricultural practices, irrigation practices. These issues cause several problems, such as land degradation, waterlogging, riverbank erosion, lowered water table. Suggested solutions included policy change, building infrastructure, controlling chemical substances, and improving irrigation practices and water usage.

Vulnerable populations (e.g., victims of river erosion, fishermen, marginal farmers, and peasants) are particularly affected by certain actors that exert a high level of power over them (e.g., shrimp cultivators, vested interest groups, or politically backed actors, such as local leaders and muscle powers, acting as fake farmers or land grabbers).

3 Effect of climate change on food systems

The respondents identified several government bodies, NGOs, donors, and developments partners as key actors and networks related to climate change and food systems, with the Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change coordinating and representing the issue area. The different actors were perceived to be sharing the same views and having no conflicting interests or disagreements about the approach.

The respondents identified erratic rainfalls, excessive heat, and rising sea levels as the main issues related to the impact of climate change on food systems. Erratic rainfalls cause droughts and flooding, damaging crops; excessive temperature results in reduced crop yields, increased weed growth, and pest invasion. The rising sea level poses a threat to mangrove forests and leads to saline intrusion. These, in turn, have a negative impact on nutrition outcomes, such as saline water increasing the blood

pressure of pregnant women resulting in pre-eclampsia. Suggested solutions include policy reform, forecasting, increased research, and building awareness.

According to the respondents, the climate change policy agenda was not subject to the undue influence of any particular actor.

4 The effect of urbanization on food systems, nutrition, and health

Respondents regarded urbanization policy processes as the result of a collaborative effort across a variety of actors from the public, private and third sectors, and no single champion was singled out.

According to the respondents, rapid urbanization—partially due to an influx of rural people affected by climate change—created many challenges in urban areas. These could be categorized as issues related to nutrition (e.g., changing food habits and lifestyle, poor hygiene, malnutrition, increase in non-communicable diseases, lack of caregivers), socio-economic differences (e.g., insufficient social safety nets, unemployment, price volatility, issues of food affordability, excess demand in market) and politics (e.g., fragmented authorities, poor implementation of rules and regulations related to food safety). The solutions are in line with the different groups of problems identified. These include nutrition interventions (e.g., awareness-raising on a healthy diet, labeling, improving WASH, nutrition-specific interventions), socio-economic interventions (e.g., better social safety net coverage, income growth and income diversification activities, development of care-giving institutions), and political interventions (e.g., creation of a comprehensive urban plan, relocation of slum dwellers, improving infrastructure, strengthening institutional capacity, and good governance).

Respondents did not identify any particular group as having more influence on the agenda than others.

5 Agri-marketing and value chain policies

Respondents regarded agricultural marketing and value chain policy processes as the result of the interactions among a variety of actors across the value chain and from the public, private and third sectors, and as such, no single champion was considered.

According to the report, the agricultural marketing and value chain domain in Bangladesh suffers from a number of critical issues. These could be grouped into three categories, namely lack of accountability across the process, poor enabling environment, and price volatility. To remedy the lack of accountability among the different players, respondents suggest setting codes of conduct across the stages, promoting existing principles, such as the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), and creating new laws. Respondents note that building effective value chains also requires improving the enabling environment, which includes improving infrastructure (e.g., uninterrupted power supply, availability of cool chain), creating incentives for actors across the chain and for investors, establishing good governance, generating an adequate budget, and improving farmers bargaining power through farmers' cooperatives or companies. According to the respondents, the issues contributing to price volatility/price increase include unauthorized toll collection, road delays, and double taxation on processed food. These, in turn, negatively impact marginalized social groups. As such, solutions should include the termination of unauthorized toll collection and double taxation, the prioritization of vehicles carrying agricultural products, market interventions, and the extension of social safety nets to the urban poor.

Under the present policy environment, dishonest businessmen, big farmers, corrupt authorities, and criminals benefit the most, while smallholders and poor, marginalized groups are negatively affected

by the actions of the more powerful groups. However, with all those negatively affected, along with the civil society, media, and NGOs now starting to push back, there is an expectation of change.

NIGERIA

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, SKILLS, AND KNOWLEDGE

Respondents felt that their personal and institutional level involvement in food systems discussions and debates was average to above average and indicated a high level of personal and institutional knowledge and understanding, along with a strong capacity to deal with food systems issues. However, they also acknowledged that their knowledge and understanding of some key national policies and strategies around food and nutrition was limited.

The government's supportiveness of food systems policies to healthy diets was viewed as average to below average, and respondents felt that different government agencies collaborated insufficiently and that the policy agenda did not reflect realities on the ground. As for influence, respondents noted that advocacy and lobbying influenced the processes only to some extent.

The respondents identified four major food systems issues, namely i) post-harvest loss and storage, ii) food production, iii) access to sufficient and healthy food, and iv) food safety and water quality. They also scored the lack of awareness of healthy diets among consumers as high and their access to knowledge and resources as low.

During the consultations preceding the field research, stakeholders identified four issue areas to guide the Nigeria policy baseline assessment: i) food and nutrition security, ii) land and water use, iii) climate change, and iv) agro-marketing and value chain. Unlike the other three reports that used these issue areas to guide their face-to-face interviews, the Nigeria study used it to guide its online survey. The findings for each issue area are outlined below.

Food and nutrition security: Respondents rated the level of food insecurity in Nigeria as high, with science, research, and food and nutrition security concerns lacking a strong influence on the food systems policy agenda, with the government perceived to be supportive to an average extent. However, they felt the private sector had a high level of contribution towards the achievement of food and nutrition security, while NGOs were perceived to have average contributions. Respondents also felt that the food security agenda was not sufficiently representative of ground realities. As major policy challenges, they identified aspects of policy implementation as the most important shortcomings, along with a lack of inclusiveness in policy formulation.

Land and water use: Respondents considered land and water use as a serious policy concern in Nigeria. However, they perceived it to receive average to below average support from the federal government, with the government failing to address poor water resource management.

Climate change: Respondents felt that the extent to which the federal government's policy agenda reflects realities in the country was average to below average, even though the majority of them agreed that climate change is expected to affect food production in the next five years.

Agricultural marketing and value chains: Participants noted that the effectiveness of the present development level of agri-marketing and value chains in Nigeria is average to below average. The majority of the respondents felt that the agri-marketing and value chain related policies were not very sensitive to food systems issues and did not reflect the realities in the country to a great extent.

ACTORS, NARRATIVES, INTERESTS

Respondents outlined a diverse policy landscape in relation to food systems, with many policies focusing on the four issue areas identified for this research. Key stakeholders include government agencies, research institutes, development partners, and actors from the private sector and the media.

The majority of respondents agree that access to sufficient, safe & healthy food is important in order to protect people from diseases, malnutrition, contamination and to nurture healthy physical development. However, they note a number of challenges that could prevent its achievement, such as a heavy focus on hunger and food quantity, lack of awareness on what constitutes a healthy diet, and lack of financial resources to satisfy one. The population segments believed to be the most vulnerable in relation to accessing sufficient, safe, and healthy food are pregnant and lactating women, children under five, and poor urban households.

Policy challenges identified by the respondents can be grouped as value chain (e.g., insufficient agricultural production, lack of storage facilities resulting in high post-harvest losses, bad roads), social (poor labor conditions), demographic (aging farmers), and—very significantly—political issues. This latter includes a plethora of difficulties, such as the ineffective implementation of policies and strategies, lack of monitoring and evaluation, lack of legal frameworks to support policies, insufficient funding, and lack of synergy among stakeholders. To resolve these issues, the government has been implementing many initiatives, such as formulating new policies, setting up a food safety management committee, engaging the youth, providing loans, incentives, and subsidies to actors across the value chain, supporting regulatory agencies, and creating awareness among the population.

Overall, respondents felt that the majority of organizations were pursuing their own interests at the expense of the public interest, and corruption also contributes to the ineffectiveness of food system related policies. For example, some political players also work in the fish industry, thus undermining attempts to tax important players in the fish industry.

ETHIOPIA

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, SKILLS, AND KNOWLEDGE

Respondents felt that their own knowledge and that of their institutions on debates surrounding the issues of food systems in general—and climate change, urbanization, agrobiodiversity, and food safety in particular—was above average. However, they felt their level of engagement with all of the particular issue areas was below average. They also believed that both themselves and their institutions possessed good capacity and technical ability to deal with issues related to food systems. The participants considered that the policy agenda's support towards healthier diets was average, with areas requiring quite some improvements. Consumer trust and accessibility of healthy diets by the urban poor were scored the lowest. The adequacy of policies in place, the awareness among policymakers and consumers about healthy diets, and the changes needed to acquire healthier diets were also regarded as below average. Respondents noted that both evidence and lobbying influenced policy processes, and they rated the level of collaboration among stakeholders as low. They identified food production, food access and consumption, and nutrition as the key issues driving the policy agenda in Ethiopia concerning food systems.

ACTORS, NARRATIVES, INTERESTS: KEY ISSUE AREAS

1 Food and nutrition policy

Respondents identified 23 key policy actors, with the majority being from government organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), and NGOs.

Respondents identified a number of issues related to the food supply chain, consumer behavior, diet quality, and policy environment in the country. Many noted that even though production and productivity have improved over the years, they are still insufficient to feed the growing population. They attributed this failure to reliance on traditional agriculture, along with poor pre- and post-harvest food loss management and weak market accessibility. Suggested solutions included the use of advanced agricultural technologies. However, it was also noted that increasing productivity on its own was insufficient to lead to healthy diets and that there was a strong necessity to create awareness about the different aspects of healthy diets, including dietary diversity. Behavior change was among the suggestions, with the inclusion of health and agriculture extension workers and religious leaders in its promotion. Furthermore, many respondents mentioned that the coordination and collaboration among sectors were still suboptimal, and thus it was crucial to improve them through measures such as better leadership and the establishment of regulatory agencies.

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture were mentioned as the most potent policy influencers, but other actors, including a university and research institute, along with CSOs and NGOs, were also noted. However, the private sector was completely missing from the process.

2 Food safety policy

Respondents identified 11 key policy actors, all from government institutions or development partners and donors.

Respondents were somewhat split on the priority of food safety on the policy agenda. While many mentioned it as a key challenge, others felt that food availability and access should be addressed before it. The respondents identified several food safety challenges. They felt that the inadequate monitoring and implementation of policies and regulations were the culprits (e.g., lack of traceability and poor labeling regulations and implementation), leading to issues like the sale of expired items, food adulteration, aflatoxin, and pesticide contamination. Limited consumer awareness and poor post-harvest management were also noted.

According to the findings, the Ministry of Health is leading the efforts in formulating food safety-related policies and regulations but has been supported by actors from all the other sectors.

3 Seqota Declaration

Respondents identified 11 key policy actors. All of the actors were from government organizations or development partners and donors.

Respondents argued that the major challenge regarding the initiative was an implementation gap stemming from issues such as lack of commitment, accountability, knowledge, and skills among the implementers. The responses also indicated that the policy formulation mostly happened at the national level, without considering the local conditions and stakeholders. The analysis highlighted the importance of the contextualization of policies through the case of the Gojjam area in Ethiopia, where

the diverse local geographies required different, tailored solutions depending on which part of the Gojjam area was targeted (i.e., western or eastern Gojjam).

No conflict of interests has been identified.

REFLECTION ON THE METHODS

The aim of this section is to discuss the strengths and limitations of how the online survey and the face-to-face interviews were conducted, with particular focus on the application of the conceptual map for policy processes discussed earlier. The structure is as follows: first, a short discussion is held on the online survey. Secondly, the face-to-face interviews are looked at by individually addressing each component of the conceptual map, namely actors & networks, policy narratives, and politics & interests. Finally, the section ends with drawing some overall conclusions and suggesting recommendations for future research.

ONLINE SURVEY

The Likert scale is a popular method used in survey research that aims to assess opinions, attitudes, or behaviors. Being an efficient, inexpensive method, it enables researchers to collect data from a large sample efficiently. As such, the four reports used it as part of online surveys in order to assess the behavior, attitude, skills, and knowledge of 91–104 respondents on food systems issues.

In general, the application of this method and the analysis of the data were relatively straightforward. The four surveys all focused on similar themes and asked similar questions, although a lot of variations have been present, relating to the contextualization of the different aims. They all uncovered information about the respondents' opinions on personal and institutional knowledge and engagement related to food systems debates, and priority food systems issues.

Presentation of data

Some differences between the four reports are worth noting, mostly to do with the presentation of the data. The Vietnam and Ethiopia reports used graphs and charts to visualize their data, mostly in an aggregate form (e.g., showing the level of institutional and personal knowledge against all the five key issue areas in one chart). This kind of display not only demonstrated the information acquired for each issue area but at the same time related them to the other issue areas, showing key differences. This made the data more comprehensible and also comparable to other sets of information. On the other hand, the Bangladesh report mostly presented information in tables on a much less aggregated level. This made it more difficult to grasp differences and linkages. The Nigeria report was the least selective of what information to include and what not, as it disaggregated all the respondents according to their sectors and included a total of 56 tables as part of the core of the analysis. While being thorough is important, including this much data made it almost impossible to capture the relevance of the different findings.

Respondent profiles

The other issue that can be mentioned is the question of representativeness of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were government officials or from academia (depending on the report). Seemingly, it was very difficult to attract participants from certain sectors. For example, in Vietnam, there were six respondents from the private sector against 91 total; in Bangladesh, there were two respondents from CSOs and six from development partners against 104 total; while in Nigeria, only three responded from NGOs and four from development partners against 101 total. This raises questions about the universality of some of the statements for the respective sectors.

The different reports dealt with this issue in different ways. The Nigeria report introduced weighing the responses against each other, while the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports focused on the acquired

information instead of who it came from, excluding the sectoral data from most of the final graphs and charts.

Self-assessment

It is also important to acknowledge that parts of the data may be skewed due to subjectivity inherent to some of the aspects that the surveys aimed to measure. While choosing an option from a pre-defined list to express one's opinion on what is the driver of the policy agenda is quite straightforward, the self-assessment of different aspects, such as knowledge, engagement, and comprehension, is more problematic. A highly self-aware individual mindful of all the information out there that they have not even approached yet may assess their knowledge much lower than someone who does not have that level of self-awareness or overview. Also, what could be considered as high-level engagement? Where does one draw the lines? Therefore, it is important to account for a level of bias in such responses and try to form the questions as measurable as possible. For example, instead of self-reporting on levels of engagement in food systems policy debate, the frequency of the actual engagement and the types of engagement could be measured.

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

Before delving deeper into the details of how the different reports made use of the ADI framework, a note needs to be made regarding the order of the three different components of the framework in the interviews and analyses. The IDS 2006 report orders the three strands of literature as follows: i) policy narratives, ii) actors & networks, and iii) politics & interests. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, all four reports refer to the conceptual map outlined by the IDS report (2006) as the actors-discourses-interests (ADI) framework.

The structures of the interview guides in the Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia reports also follow this A-D-I order. The subsequent data presentation and analysis is also structured into these three sections, but data from the interviews is sometimes presented under a different section at the discretion of the authors. For example, the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports deal with most of the actor considerations that are not related only to the list of key actors under the politics & interests section, and the Bangladesh report once deals with the actor considerations under the discourses section. As for the Nigeria report, it did not separate the analysis according to the three approaches but presented the findings in a different way, including each interview question and their corresponding answers as part of its results section.

The consequences of the different ordering arrangements will be discussed in the conclusions part of this section.

ACTORS & NETWORKS

The spread of knowledge

Key policy actors

The reports listed a number of key policy actors (individuals and/or institutions), presenting the name of the key policy actors along with the type of institution they belong to. The Bangladesh report took one step further and also included information on their type of involvement. This is a welcome addition, as it helps readers who may not be familiar with the different actors in the key issue areas situate their role in the processes better.

The reports were able to identify between 11 and 30 key policy actors for each issue area through the data collected via the interviews. While the upper end seems like a number probably exhausting the number of key policy actors involved, the lower end raises the question of whether some actors may have been missed. Furthermore, it is important to note that regardless of the quantity of the actors identified, it would be difficult to state with confidence that most of the key actors have been successfully covered without first triangulating the data through different sources of information.

While the Bangladesh report included all NGOs, donors, and development partners mentioned by the respondents by name—thus displaying a richer picture of the international community in the country—the Vietnam report often aggregated the information for these institutions and actors. For example, it included actors according to more generalized groupings, such as "associations," "NGOs," "donors and development agencies" not by their actual names. When it referred to them by their actual names, it did not always list all the actors involved, e.g., "INGOs (Oxfam, SNV, VECO, etc.)." By naming all the government institutions but not doing the same for third sector actors, it visually decreased their contribution and importance for the policy areas, even though that may not be the case.

Furthermore, even though the interview questions specifically stated interest in the level where the different actors operated, this is not really apparent from the analysis. While it is more straightforward with government ministries for example, it is not as straightforward with other actors. Explicitly adding this information could have shown how large of a scope has been covered by the collected data and potentially indicated if the policymaking processes were top-down or more participatory. This latter is especially important as in many cases respondents complained about the gap between the policy content and its implementation, raising a possibility that the voice of the implementers (often residing at sub-national or local levels) has been ignored in the agenda-setting and decision-making processes.

Networks

The actor-network approach calls for moving beyond looking at individual actors and argues for the mapping of networks, coalitions, alliances of actors (individuals, institutions) to get a better picture about the construction of knowledge.

Even though the original question guides aimed to explore the existence of networks, most of the analyses in the reports stay at the level of actors and do not give much information about the interactions among them. This may be due to insufficient data acquired from the interviews. Based on the interview data in Bangladesh, there is a strong indication that the majority of the respondents were unable to answer the questions related to network formation. The ones who have attempted to outline networks remained vague about the exact participants, referring to them according to their general grouping ("NGOs," "the civil society," "the media"). Therefore, no particular set of specific groups working together towards a common goal emerged from the reports.

The reason behind the difficulty of acquiring this data may be that for individual informants, it is likely much easier to list a number of key actors than to place them within networks and show the spiderweb of how they relate to each other. Mapping networks of actors may be a too complex exercise for individuals to deal with in a short timeframe that is provided during an interview.

Furthermore, according to IDS 2006, actor-networks may take advantage of "different degrees of policy spaces in order to establish and uphold different discourses" (p. 18). Based on the guidelines, the interviews started with exploring the actors instead of the discourses. Thus, another reason may have been the aforementioned issue of the narratives not being linked to the actors section, making it difficult to establish what networks may be moving what knowledge. At the point of discussing the

actors with the interviewees, the different policy issues had not been discussed yet, and no specific problem areas had been set. Therefore, questions on "groups or networks of actors who [...] share the same view", "disagreements about approaches to address this issue" and "disagreements […] about the cause of the problem" may have been too early to be answered, and in turn were barely answered, at least in the case of Bangladesh.

Power – Influence

It can be argued that questions of power, such as levels of influence, should be included under the section on politics and interests, and the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports proceeded as such. However, an argument can also be made for the inclusion of power considerations under each section. First of all, according to Keeley & Scoones (1999), "the three approaches to understanding policy change […] make use of different models of power" (p. 28). Under the actor-network theory, they refer to the movement of knowledge as "chains of persuasion and influence" and note that the related literature claims "that power lies in the strength and reach of the networks that are constructed" (Keeley & Scoones, 1999, p. 28). As such, in this report, considerations on influence will be discussed under the current section. Two components of influence will be explored: i) levels of influence, ii) instruments of influence.

Levels of influence

The Vietnam and Ethiopia reports graphically mapped out the levels of influence of the different key actors from each issue areas along two axes. The horizontal axis presents the type of institutions the key policy actors mentioned in the narratives section belong to, and the vertical axis reflects their degree of power and influence (ranging from less influential to more influential). This visual representation helps enhance the understanding of power relations and the significance of the different actors in policymaking and thus is a very informative addition. The other reports do not utilize this form of visualization, although they cover the level of influences to some extent, but not for all issue areas.

Instruments of influence

As mentioned previously, a key aspect of this literature is not just its focus on the existence of actors and networks but also on the way they exert agency and spread knowledge. However, even the Vietnam report stops at showing who has influence and how much do they have and does not go much into *how* they exert this influence, besides providing one example.

Champions

Revealing policy entrepreneurs in policy processes can be very informative, as it has the potential to uncover deeper dynamics about the transformative role of certain individuals or groups in either creating or seizing momentum for policy change. This report regards the concept of champions to be equal to the concept of policy entrepreneurs explored by Keeley and Scoones (1999).

The country reports were able to identify champions in the different key issue areas with differing success. For example, the Bangladesh report went into detailing the account of one of the respondents on the importance of the Honorable Prime Minister as a champion in the battle against climate change. The account includes key defining moments under the Honorable Prime Minister's guidance, such as the formation of the first climate action plan among developing nations and the acquisition of funds through the formation of a resilience fund for the cause. By including this information, the

report was able to peel back a further layer of the complex interactions behind policy change and demonstrate how a single actor can be very influential in bringing about transformation.

However, with the exception of this one case, the reports either only named the champions—explaining why and how they could be considered as such solely to a limited extent or not at all—or they did not name any champions at all. While it is possible for policy areas to not have champions, there may be some champions that were missed during the data collection for some reason. These reasons may include the lack of data triangulation and the lack of understanding of the concept.

As for the former, all the analyses relied only on interviews. Data triangulation may have shown a much more complex picture of champions in the different policy areas. For example, the section of the Ethiopia report discussing the Seqota Declaration initiative does not include any champions. However, document search shows that there were some very significant champions in the formulation and pushing of the initiative, such as Emama Turunba, Frealem Shibabaw, and the Deputy Prime Minister (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019).

As for the latter, there may have been confusion about the concept of policy champions or policy entrepreneurs, partially stemming from the way the interview question was asked. The question contrasts an agenda being driven by certain champions against an agenda being driven by a collaborative effort. These two forces are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While certain agendas may have particularly influential individuals with a lot of resources moving them forward or aligning themselves with them, this does not mean that other actors cannot be working in collaboration towards the same goal. There is an indication in the Bangladesh interview data that asking the question in this form may have been counterintuitive, as it prompted respondents to choose between the two options, leading to potentially skewed data. Furthermore, there is an indication in some of the interview data acquired in Bangladesh that respondents may have misunderstood the concept—not everyone supporting a cause, "pushing" an agenda, or "raising a voice" can be regarded as a policy entrepreneur.

Concluding remarks

The reports were able to identify a number of key policy actors. However, they were much less able to indicate the different networks they formed, let alone identify small interactions among them. This raises questions about the suitability of interviews for exploring networks. It would be interesting to see if focus group discussions proved more useful for network mapping, for example, through the usage of social network analysis combined with power mapping (Brouwer & Brouwers, 2017). It also raises questions about the appropriateness of including actor considerations at the beginning of interviews before discussing narratives. This will be discussed more at length at a later point. As for the identification of champions or key policy entrepreneurs, while some insights have been made, there is an indication that respondents were confused by the question used in the interviews, thus limiting data on this.

As for power considerations, the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports were able to show the influence of the different key policy actors mentioned in the narratives. However, they were unable to uncover the forms in which these actors interacted and their relation to the different narratives (e.g., maintaining, challenging, suppressing, etc.). As a matter of fact, with the exception of one mention, none of the reports were able to show the forms in which the different key actors interacted. This is where the actor-network theory could have come in as helpful in enhancing this understanding. Networks may use a plethora of instruments to forward their visions or to recruit new actors. These instruments could include (but not exhaustively): actor interfaces (e.g., events, meetings, summits workshops, field

visits, demonstrations); measures (e.g., projects, programs, strategies, schemes, school curricula); data sources (e.g., publications, influential research studies, journal articles, statistics); even funding lines (IDS 2006). The examination of such instruments would have not only helped in explaining how knowledge was mobilized but may have also helped with acquiring data on the different networks.

Finally, given that the data was not triangulated for any aspect of this part of the research, there is a chance that a number of key actors and champions have been missed. To strengthen the confidence in the acquired information, the usage of literature or document review would have been useful.

POLICY NARRATIVES

The construction of knowledge

As mentioned previously, a narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it basically provides a diagnosis about what is wrong, what needs to be done to put it right, and how. As a result, they shape policy decisions in certain ways. This paper will argue that for such stories to be meaningful for policy process analysis purposes, they need to be: i) cohesive, ii) structured, and iii) contextualized.

Cohesion

It can be argued that given that narratives have a beginning (the origin of the problem), a middle (the core of the issue), and an end (the way to fix the problem) (IDS, 2006; Béné et al., 2019), ideally the storytelling should not be fragmented or broken. As such, a cohesive story should comprise all of these three components presented together in a sequential way.

In the Bangladesh report, there was some presence of the three components presented cohesively, although that was not the dominant way of presentation. In the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports, there is only one section (food trade policy for the former and food and nutrition policy for the latter) under which a policy issue is presented in a way that resembles a narrative. The Nigeria report does not contain cohesive narratives at all.

The two main reasons for the lack of cohesive narrative were either a missing component (beginning, middle, or end not present) or a broken storyline (the different components presented separately).

Missing components

While sometimes it is questionable if the 'beginning' or 'middle' may be missing from the different analyses (as it is somewhat difficult to draw the line where the core and the origin is standing), the component most certainly missing across the reports on a more regular basis has been the 'end'.

For example, in the majority of stories presented in the analysis section of the Vietnam report, the 'end' component seems to be completely missing. Instead, the focus is on what policy issues have been raised by the different respondents, if they are technical or political, and if they have a spillover into other domains. While these hold important information, i.e., spillovers are particularly useful for a holistic food systems view, without an end, they do not amount to the level of narratives. Similarly, in the Ethiopia report, under the section on food safety, no solutions have been identified at all. It is unclear why these were not included (e.g., no data, too much data, or discretion of the author), as their interview guides suggest that this information was sought for.

As for the Nigeria report, while the interviews of the other research projects asked the respondents about what they felt the solutions were to the identified policy issues, the Nigeria interview guide did not ask the participants about this. Instead, it solely focused on identifying food systems related

policies and policy challenges. Whereas the information gathered is informative in its own way, the exclusion of this question made it impossible to build narratives.

Broken storylines

As mentioned previously, the Vietnam report aimed to categorize the narratives according to their technical-versus-political aspect and argued that usually one type of problem framing (e.g., technical) is most often associated with the same type of solution framing (also technical). The section on urbanization policy mentions the issues and solutions raised categorized according to this decision. While this divides the definitions and solutions into two somewhat relatable groups, ultimately, the problem definitions and solutions are still not really presented thematically. As such, they do not form cohesive stories.

As for the Bangladesh report, while most of the time the three components are more or less presented, they are often not presented together. Instead, for the most part, the report first outlines the different problem definitions that have been mentioned during the interviews and then bundles together the different suggested courses of action. Similarly, the Ethiopia report also outlines the different problems first and then bundles together the different solutions, albeit it does so according to the aforementioned technical and political divide used in the Vietnam report.

Structuration

Based on the definition of the concept 'narrative', almost anything said with a beginning, middle, and an end can be one. However, not all narratives are created equal. Individual narratives may be interesting to see but may not be able to tell us much about the dynamics in the policy processes in question. Therefore, it can prove useful to structure the relevant individual responses around more aggregate narratives when possible and exclude the less relevant ones when necessary.

As previously mentioned, the Vietnam report does structure the narratives found through their interviews according to two dimensions: a political-technical dimension and their scope. The Ethiopia report also uses the political-technical division, but only for its section on solutions. This is one step more than listing all the narratives that emerged during the interviews. However, it is a more general, almost 'one size fits all' division that was applied for the narratives found in all the five issue areas in the case of Vietnam, as opposed to issue-specific, 'personalized' categorizations.

The Bangladesh report's narrative section is sometimes more structured, grouping similar problem definitions and solutions together, but more often not. The Nigeria report actually avoids modifying the comments of the respondents, explicitly noting that efforts have been made to retain the responses as close to original as possible.

While 'naming' is not a requirement for narrative building and is oftentimes impossible to do, none of the reports give a specific or catchy name to any of the stories, and nor do they group them under a certain category name specific to their content, even though there is an indication of the presence of some more common narratives (these will be discussed at a later stage).

As for the question of selectiveness, the Vietnam and the Ethiopia reports seem to be relatively selective, i.e., including the responses they feel are the most relevant. However, the Bangladesh report on occasions seemingly just lists every single response that has been mentioned, and the Nigeria report is also wary of excluding answers. While each individual account is valid, not every story may be relevant for the policy processes, especially if there are barely any supporters behind them.

Contextualization

Keeley & Scoones (1999) argue that according to the discourse literature, power lies in discourse itself. Like in any case where power relations are present, "some narratives tend to gain more authority, persisting at the expense of others" (IDS, 2006, p. 10). One of the important objectives of policy process analysis is to uncover and understand why certain narratives become dominant and discover what alternatives exist and how the policy space could be opened up to their inclusion. To do that, it can be argued that first, it would be necessary to establish what is currently included in the policy area under examination (potentially along with its evolution) and then explore if there are any contenders out there challenging the status quo.

The Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia reports all present information related to food policies, be it a more recent policy landscape on food systems and food security or the evolution of policies related to food. This information is crucial to situate the research in the wider political context. However, these sections focus mostly on food policies and do not give information about the current policies for the specific key issue areas identified in each country (e.g., urbanization, land and water use, climate change, trade, etc.), nor do they determine which narratives dominate any of the policies. As such, they were unable to differentiate the weight of the narratives they aimed to establish. This may have contributed to blurring the lines between the narratives.

Concluding remarks

Most of the narratives presented in the four reports were not cohesive, structured, or contextualized.

The cohesion of narratives was often limited as either a key component was missing (the beginning, middle, or the end), or the storyline was broken. There is no indication in the interview data that the stories told by the respondents were always incomplete; thus, it is safe to assume that most of the time, the fragmentation was due to the way the information was presented. Presenting the stories based on how they were told (or a theme under which they could go) would have given a better idea of the storylines that have been shared.

A further issue commonly seen was the limited attempt to structure different narratives into themes. While there is no information on how the data provided in the analyses was processed, there is an indication that no thematic coding was used for the data (with potentially the exception of the Vietnam report). As such, the ideas were often presented on an individual level, without a name or category, making it impossible to refer back to them at later stages of the analyses. Processing the data through thematic coding (indexing, categorizing) and proceeding to a thematic analysis would have probably been helpful in categorizing similar ideas and themes and building more informative narratives. It would have potentially also shown some interconnections between the different themes, which were not present. Consulting wider literature may have also helped with naming some narratives.

The reports also did not identify the relations between the different storylines. Without an understanding of the dominant narrative, it is difficult to establish where the policy processes stand and what can be done to change that. Starting the research project with a literature and document analysis for each policy area would have indicated the dominant narratives in those documents. From then on, it would have been easier to situate the findings and identify which narratives go against the main items on the agenda. There is an indication that this latter component is particularly helpful for narrative-building in the article of Bene et al. (2020), where the researchers used the data generated during the Vietnam project, situated it in the wider political context, and consulted scientific literature,

and the narrative of supermarketization rapidly emerged as a key narrative dominating the Vietnamese policy agenda.

Ensuring that the aforementioned three components are present in future research analyzing and presenting policy narratives could help deepen the acquired information and conclusions drawn from them.

POLITICS & INTERESTS

The motives behind particular forms of knowledge

Influence vs. interests

Even though the interview questions in all four reports covered the issues of winners and losers—so there is potentially information available on politics and interests in the data—the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports consider neither the particular politics and interests behind the different actors and the narratives they influence nor the potential conflicts among the various interests at play. Instead, they mostly focus on the levels of influence across the different actors under this section. The question of influence has already been discussed under the actors & networks section. The discussion on power vs. influence will not be repeated here; instead, the question of influence vs. interests will be the focus.

The Vietnam and Ethiopia reports imply that the higher the level of influence, the more a certain group benefits from a particular policy, and the lower the level of influence, the more negatively affected a particular group is. Even though this may hold true for some cases, it may also be incorrect for others. While influence is an important aspect of power, it does not tell much about the level or scope of interest a particular actor has in the specific policy area, nor does it tell much about who stands to benefit and who to lose from the promotion of a certain narrative, especially as no dominant narrative has been singled out.

For example, under discussing climate change and food systems, the Vietnam report notes that the private sector is excluded or absent in the agenda-setting of policies. While it is an important piece of information, it does not tell us the reason why: is it because the other actors actively exclude private sector actors, or is it because they just lack interest in those policies? These have different policy implications. The former would require opening up the policy space to private sector actors, and the latter would require creating incentives to be able to harness their potential resources. Furthermore, regardless of their level of influence, sometimes the interests of certain actors may be aligned. While this changes who stands to benefit and who stands to lose, it does not necessarily change the power and influence the actor groups have in general.

The Bangladesh report was able to reveal some specific conflicts of interest among different groups, although it was unable to uncover any power dynamics for two of the key issue areas. Furthermore, the presentation of the conflicts was done in a list and disaggregated format, which took away from the cohesion of the text.

The Nigeria report also included a few specific conflicts of interest, but overall, it was more able to confirm that most organizations were "pursuing their own interest at the detriment of the public interest" (Ojide & Ogunji, 2018, p. 33) than what these interests actually were.

Implementation gap

All four reports discussed some components of policies versus implementation.

For example, the Ethiopia report highlights (albeit under the narratives section) how respondents note implementation gap as a key challenge between what was set out in the Seqota Declaration and what is being achieved. Lack of commitment, accountability, sense of ownership, knowledge, etc. This may indicate some bureaucratic agency, for example, lack of motivation to prioritize an issue where they do not possess the required knowledge and skills, considering it as too high effort and prioritizing other agendas. However, we do not learn about the level at which this is causing issues, e.g., regional, zonal, woreda, kebele level, nor of what gets prioritized instead.

Similarly, the Vietnam, Nigeria, and Bangladesh reports also identify a gap between policymakers and policy implementers (all of them in their narratives section). It could have been interesting to explore this more in-depth under the politics section, including the identification of the specific implementers in question and to examine the different reasons and interests that may be at play.

Concluding remarks

While the Bangladesh and Nigeria reports were able to identify some conflicts of interest across different groups, the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports have not considered this item at all. Furthermore, the Bangladesh report also struggled to identify political considerations for two of its issue areas, and the Nigeria report was unable to specify the different interests. This raises questions about the data collection method. While certain interests may be easier to identify (e.g., private sector representatives vs. any other group), more subtle interests could prove difficult to identify through interviews only. For example, people may also not be as forthcoming about their interests as ideal. Therefore, interviews should probably be accompanied by another form of method to uncover more power relations. Furthermore, key national-level policy actors may be less aware of local interests and dynamics; thus, it would be useful to ensure to include some actors that reside more at the lower levels among the respondents.

Whereas policy design and implementation gap analysis are complex issues with a number of diverse challenges, the interests and priorities of the implementers are crucial to it. Therefore, it would have been interesting to identify this prior to the interviews (through a literature review, for example) and then look into the bureaucratic politics around the key issue areas where implementation gaps persist. This would have also given some voice to the implementers who may have been disregarded during policy discussions to tell their own version of the policy implementation gap.

CONCLUSIONS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS
Framework

The overall application of the framework yielded insightful data into policy processes in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. However, the research projects were quite selective of which components to include and which to exclude.

For the examination of actors and networks, they mostly focused on actors and champions at the expense of networks, interactions, and modes of influence. Most of the narratives presented in the report either lacked cohesion, structuration, or contextualization (or all of them). The information presented under this section remained informative but was not possible to be linked to in the other sections. Under politics & interests, there was an overfocus on the influence actors exert (that is arguably an overlapping component with the actor-network theory), and less focus on components

only specific to the politics and interests literature, such as society or state interests, or bureaucratic politics, i.e., the structural part of the conceptual map.

Furthermore, the purpose of the conceptual framework mapped out by Keeley & Scoones (1999) was to look at the *same issues* through different perspectives. The reports aimed to proceed accordingly but oftentimes looked at different issues through the different perspectives. This probably has to do with the disconnect between the presentation of the three components.

This disconnect could be due to the way the whole framework is presented. All four reports refer to the framework as A-D-I, actors-discourses-interests and use this order in their interview guides. However, none of the projects explored the narratives out there before the interviews. Therefore, respondents were first asked to map key policy actors that deal with the same issues without first exploring what those issues were. While the data collection and presentation has not been specifically prescribed by Keeley & Scoones (1999), the results from the data collection and presentation indicate that A-D-I may not be the best order and that starting with the narratives and not from the actors may be more beneficial. While there is a lot of interaction between the three components (all influencing each other), it can be argued that at the end of the day, the narratives are the particular forms of knowledge that actor-networks spread, maintain or challenge, and their personal agendas and interests are their motives. The IDS report also indicates this order, changing the presentation of the three strands of literature from politics & interests, actor & networks, and discourses from original the Keeley & Scoones working paper (1999) to presenting them in the order of policy narratives, actors & networks, and politics & interests. This is rather a practical than a theoretical suggestion and does not suppose the superiority of narratives over actors & networks or politics & interests. However, arguably, starting with actors & networks or politics & interests with leaving discourses to the end may not lead to the same results or may require a lot more resources. Discourses can be built from a document review, and they usually imply key actors and their interests at play, while this is not necessarily true vice versa.

This order, at least during the data collection, could help first establish the dominant and alternative narratives, and with them could come a plethora of actors, interests, and further discourses.

Methods

Online surveys

The surveys were appropriate to acquire a large amount of data and to attract a larger sample. However, the framework used for the surveys was not linked to the framework used for the interviews, and the data acquired was not linked to the interview data analysis data. Furthermore, there is questionable representation of the different sectors in the samples and a degree of bias that comes with respondents' self-assessment on aspects such as knowledge and skills. Therefore, ensuring that the respondent sample for online surveys is representative of the different sectors and that the survey questions mitigate the inherent bias that comes with perceptions (e.g., asking more measurable aspects of engagement or knowledge) may help improve the accuracy of the answers.

Interviews

The interviews have proven appropriate for collecting a lot of the data but also insufficient on their own. Given the lack of triangulation, not much confidence can be given to any of the sections solely relying on them. This kind of research requires contextualization and verification if it is to be used to identify policy spaces, which interviews only are unable to provide. Furthermore, interviews proved less appropriate for acquiring data on networks and interests. Introducing other tools, such as

document and literature review, as well as social network analysis combined with power mapping could help acquire more information on these.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As established above, there is potential in the conceptual map outlined by Keeley & Scoones (1999) and IDS (2006) for policy analysis. The aim of the following section is to provide some ideas and guidance on how to proceed with future research using the framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Keeley & Scoones emphasize that the conceptual map designed by them is by no means exhaustive; rather, it is "perhaps best envisaged as a menu — a selection of prompts to ask useful questions of policy — rather than an all encompassing conceptual map" (IDS 2006, p. 7). They also used a qualitative and eclectic methodology and highlighted the importance of contextualization.

Therefore, there is not one single way that these three policy strands can be applied. However, it can be argued that particular components are necessary for every research that aims to use this conceptual map. The following steps are most likely necessary in order to provide a well-rounded picture of the different dynamics around policies (not necessarily in this order).

- Historical and political contextualization
    - E.g., evolution of policy agenda, policy landscape in general, state formation, regime changes, etc.
- Mapping the current state of affairs
    - Presentation of status quo, dominant policy narratives, key actor-networks and the interests that motivate them
- Mapping challenges to the state of affairs
    - E.g., alternative policy narratives, key actors-networks, and political interests
- Examination of policy space
    - Evaluation of strategies for changing and influencing policy in light of the findings

Table 1 below summarizes a few of the options for data collection for the different parts.

Table 1. Data collection methods for policy process analysis

Components	Data collection
Historical and political contextualization	Document & literature review - Media statements - Scientific literature - Official communications - Policy documents - Plans - Initiatives - Laws - Policy statements - Etc.
Identification of current state of affairs: dominant policy narrative(s)	Document & literature review Media analysis (In)formal observation Semi-structured interviews
Identification of current state of affairs: key actor-networks	Document & literature review (In)formal observation

	Focus group discussion
Identification of current state of affairs: political interests	Document & literature review (In)formal observation Semi-structured interviews Focus group discussion
Identification of alternative narratives, actor-networks and interests	Document & literature review (In)formal observation Semi-structured interviews Open-ended qualitative survey

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While data analysis and presentation will depend on the acquired information, thematic coding and thematic analysis would probably be appropriate for the former. As for the latter, whereas the information acquired through the three different bodies of literature can be presented according to the category (in that case, the suggestion is to follow a narrative-networks-interest line) many times merging them together to tell a story of different narratives competing against each other could be more appropriate.

Some other considerations for this research are related to the expertise of the researcher. Given that the conceptual map refers to three broad and rich strands of literature, it would be important to either work as part of a multidisciplinary team where at least one researcher is familiar with the strands of literature or ensure to consult with an expert. Building narratives is a particularly challenging task, and ensuring to include someone on the team with experience with them may prove crucial at times.

FOOD SYSTEMS POLICIES

The four reports identified a number of issues in the different food systems. While they may not amount to narratives, they do tell us about the potential food systems policy priorities prevalent in each country. The summary of the key issue areas examined by each of the reports can be found in table 2.

Table 2. Critical policy domains related to food systems

Vietnam	Bangladesh	Nigeria	Ethiopia
Urbanization	Food & nutrition security	Food & nutrition security	Food & nutrition
Climate change	Land & water use	Land & water use	Food safety
Food safety	Climate change	Climate change	Seqota Declaration
Food trade	Urbanization	Agri-marketing & value chain	
Agro-biodiversity	Agro-marketing & value chain		

The following section will discuss the similarities and differences for each of the issue areas highlighted above.

FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY POLICIES

Besides the Vietnam report, all the other reports discussed the food and nutrition security policies. Probably due to the more holistic nature of food and nutrition security policies, respondents identified a plethora of issues for this policy area. These are summarized in table 3 below for easier readability.

Table 3. Overview of key food and nutrition security issues mentioned by the respondents

	Bangladesh *	Nigeria	Ethiopia
Elements			
Food supply chain	*Inadequate agricultural input/output (e.g., seeds, feed, broodstock quality) *Need to increase production *Too much focus on rice production *Absence of scientific & commercial farming	*Insufficient production *Poor post-harvest loss management/no processing facilities *Lack of storage facility	*Reliance on traditional agriculture *Insufficient production & productivity *Poor diversification *Poor pre/post-harvest loss management *Poor & weak market accessibility
Food environment	*Unsafe food *Insufficient availability, affordability	*Unsafe food *Lack of affordability	*Lack of diversity, safety, availability, accessibility, affordability
Consumer behavior	*Low awareness on hygiene, nutrition & healthy diets	*Low awareness of healthy diets *Focus on quantity, not quality *Processed food viewed as safe and healthy	*Low awareness of dietary diversity
Diet	*Dependency on rice	x	x

Drivers			
Biophysical and environmental	*Overexploitation of natural resources *Land, water pollution *Climate change *Soil degradation *Decreasing water table	x	x
Innovation, technology, infrastructure	*Lack of infrastructure (power, storage, logistics)	*Bad road network *Lack of infrastructure	x
Political and economic	*Lack of good governance *Weak regulatory mechanisms	*No legal framework for some policies *Ineffective implementation *Lack of monitoring & evaluation (ag production, food policies) *Corruption	*Suboptimal coordination and collaboration among sectors
Socio-cultural	x	x	x
Demographic	x	*Ageing farmers	x

Based on the table, the issues identified by the respondents relate to many different components of the food systems.

AGRO-MARKETING AND VALUE CHAIN POLICIES

The Bangladesh report discusses agro-marketing and value chain policy issues at length. According to the report, value chain development is currently a very popular demand in the country. The main issues identified by the respondents were mostly related to unequal power dynamics and politics. These include price volatility due to power plays, such as unauthorized toll collection (through extortion), but also due to double taxation. Furthermore, respondents noted the lack of accountability throughout the process as a major cause to inefficiencies in the system, such as the inability to reinforce food safety compliance. They also mentioned the issue of a lacking enabling environment, including poor infrastructure and insufficient incentives for investment.

The Nigeria report suggests that agri-marketing and value chain management in the country requires improvement to meet the expectations of key policy actors but does not expand on the topic.

This policy area is not specifically addressed in the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports, although components of value chain development, such as market dynamics, have been mentioned in the former.

FOOD SAFETY POLICIES

The Vietnam and Ethiopia reports both dealt with the issue of food safety in depth. In the case of Vietnam, food safety was voted the number one food systems issue during the online survey. During the interviews, key informants criticized both the existing policies and the lack of enforcement concerning regulations. As for Ethiopia, regardless of the absence of a stand-alone food safety policy, respondents felt it was important to include it and highlight key challenges in this area. Similar to Vietnam, they emphasized the lack of enforcement of food safety regulations. However, as opposed to Vietnam, many respondents felt that food safety considerations should not become a priority yet; first, there is a need to ensure food availability and access.

While the issue of food safety was not individually dealt with in the case of the Bangladesh and Nigeria reports, both pieces mention its importance for healthy diets and the consequences of the lack of quality control.

URBANIZATION POLICIES

According to the information acquired by the research conducted in Vietnam, respondents were somewhat split regarding the question of market dynamics and food safety in urban areas. Many emphasized that controlling informal markets for food safety was challenging and that needed to change, and retail companies have also been pressuring the government to modernize the market. Others emphasized the importance of local (informal) markets, and according to them, many consumers were reluctant to change to supermarkets they trusted less, regardless of their availability. However, some noted that the consumer behavior had been changing, and many people living in urban areas have started to support a different lifestyle, albeit choosing less healthy and eco-friendly options (through big corporations). Respondents acknowledged that urbanization contributed to land pressure and diminishing agricultural land. Many political and governance issues have also been noted, related to a top-down, siloed approach, competing interests, and lack of capacity to implement.

In line with the Vietnam report, the Bangladesh report also discussed food safety issues, noting that ensuring safe food has been a big challenge. According to the report, this is due to poor governance, fragmented authorities, and businessmen taking advantage of the great demand through pushing adulterated food in the markets. However, the market dynamics (i.e., informal markets vs. supermarkets) were mentioned much fewer times than in the case of Vietnam. Instead, there was more focus on the consequences of too fast urbanization (and the issues that it brought with itself) on the urban population, e.g., price volatility, unemployment, extreme malnutrition, lack of social protection, women in the workforce resulting in lack of carers at home, etc.

Even though there may be an increasingly vulnerable urban poor population in Nigeria and Ethiopia, the reports did not consider urbanization as a high priority area.

CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

Respondents in the Vietnam report heavily focused on politics and governance around climate matters. These included issues with both the policy content and policy implementation, conflicting interests, and a gap between national and local priorities and capacities. Less focus was given to the actual impacts of climate change, although the trade-off between agricultural development and climate change objectives has been mentioned. Migration was also mentioned as a consequence of climate change.

As opposed to Vietnam, respondents in the Bangladesh report focused almost exclusively on the impact of climate change on agricultural production, i.e., how climate change "threatens" production. Respondents highlighted three consequences of climate change, namely erratic rainfall, excessive heat, and rising sea levels, causing crop damage and lower yields, encouraging weed growth and pest attacks, and leading to saline intrusion, among others. They also mentioned certain negative nutrition outcomes. Furthermore, similarly to Vietnam, climate change has been mentioned as a driver of migration, in this case specifically connected to migration to urban areas, showing the linkage between these two food systems drivers.

Respondents to the online survey conducted as part of the Nigeria assessment agreed that climate change poses a threat to domestic production, and they rated the extent to which the federal

government's policy agenda on climate change reflects an adequate understanding of the realities in the country below average.

The Ethiopia report did not particularly discuss the effects of climate change on Ethiopia's food systems.

AGRO-BIODIVERSITY POLICIES

The Vietnam report identifies a number of policy issues related to agro-biodiversity and food systems. A large number of the critique is about modern farming practices and their negative impact on indigenous breeds and varieties and natural ecosystems, along with their pollution and contamination. Practices such as the use of high-yield varieties, overuse of pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides, intensive farming, and the introduction of high-production varieties were mentioned as some of the biggest contributors to biodiversity loss. Respondents noted issues around the policy content and implementation as well.

While the Ethiopia report touches on the issue of agrobiodiversity in its survey, it reveals that the respondents' level of involvement in food systems debates related to agrobiodiversity was limited. The Bangladesh and Nigeria reports do not discuss this issue area.

LAND AND WATER USE POLICIES

Many issues identified by the Bangladesh report under this policy area relate to two aforementioned food systems drivers, i.e., urbanization and climate change, as these have quite some consequences for land and water use. As for the former, respondents argued that urbanization and infrastructure development put a lot of pressure on arable land, whereas the floods and rising sea levels due to climate change caused riverbank erosion and saline waterlogging, resulting in the loss of arable land. As for the latter, decreased rainfall due to climate change contributed to the increasing depletion of the water table in part of the country. The other factors mentioned by the respondents were more linked to agricultural practices, such as monoculture, use of agrochemicals, and depletion of underground water for irrigation purposes.

While the Vietnam report does not discuss land and water use policies particularly, some concerns raised are similar to the ones presented in the Bangladesh report. Respondents emphasized the impact of urbanization on agricultural land, and concerns were also raised about the pollution of water sources by agrochemicals. Furthermore, as discussed under the driver of climate change, its impact on arable land (due to salt water in the Mekong Delta) was also raised.

The Nigeria report addressed questions to land and water use policies in its online survey. The results suggested that the topic was not high on the policy agenda, even though a great proportion of the participants noted that an integrated water management and coordinated development program on land, water, and relevant resources would be beneficial for overcoming food and nutrition security concerns in the country. The Ethiopia report does not refer to such policies at all, even though land and water issues are prevalent in the country.

TRADE POLICIES

The only report particularly dealing with the area of trade policies was the Vietnam report. According to respondents, many of the food systems challenges the country has been facing are the results of the ongoing integration of the country into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Based on the answers of many respondents, the increased pressure to open up the economy has exposed the

situation in the country's domestic market, and there is concern about the vulnerability of the domestic players against foreign ones. The vulnerability of the domestic market is not helped by the lack of enabling business environment prevalent in the country. Respondents noted a plethora of issues, including hidden transaction costs, no incentives to invest in agriculture, and difficulties for enterprises and farmers posed by unnecessary business conditions, among others. Concerns about the government's monopoly over rice export and lack of food safety considerations concerning raw feed import were also raised.

The Nigeria report asked the survey participants about the extent to which trade restrictions in Nigeria have helped the country achieve food security. The majority of the respondents disagreed or were undecided. However, no further information was provided. According to the findings of the Ethiopia report—where a question on trade was also explored during the online survey—the engagement of the respondents in trade discussions related to food systems was limited.

One potential reason behind global trade being a more pressing issue in Vietnam as opposed to the other countries may be due to its current status in international trading. Seemingly, the country's ongoing negotiation with the WTO regarding its free trade agreement has exposed the weaknesses of the domestic situation. On the other hand, Nigeria and Bangladesh have been members of the WTO—and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)—for decades, while Ethiopia is still in the process of accession.

DISCUSSION

Given that the interviews conducted as part of the research projects only provide the perspectives of the interviewees on the policy processes, they are not necessarily representative of what is actually happening in the policies of the different countries, especially as the reports did not discuss the particular polices the different sections dealt with. However, a few matters still emerge.

A lot of the blame is assigned to lacking policies and ineffective implementation. There is a strong indication of continued heavily top-down approaches in food systems policy areas, resulting in a disconnect between policymakers and implementers. Furthermore, conflicts of interests frequently proved to be detrimental to progress in certain areas. On the other hand, there is a shared understanding that food systems policies require increased collaboration among many actors in all four countries, especially between the different ministries. While the level at which the interview respondents operate is not explicit in the reports, most seem to be national-level actors based on their institutions. Consequently, they are likely to operate more in policy planning and policymaking processes and potentially less in implementation. Whereas it is important to know the dominant voices in the policymaking processes, giving them the focus resulted in getting only one side of the story. In future research, ensuring that the selection of respondents includes actors from the different stages of the policymaking process across different levels could help give voice to more diverse actors and may shed light on some more profound (implementation) challenges.

The majority of the chosen policy areas are related more to food systems drivers than food systems elements. Interestingly, while most countries noted insufficient production as a considerable problem, agriculture policies were not discussed. This raises the question of the perception of respondents on agricultural issues. Value chain components have still been discussed. One may argue that the shift in focus from agriculture in policy debates is a welcome feature. Agricultural productivity has long been a driver of food systems debates, and food security outcomes were very strongly associated with it in the past. The Bangladesh and Vietnam reports looked at policy areas that may be less often associated with the food and nutrition security outcome of food systems (e.g., land and water use, climate

change, and agro-biodiversity) and traditionally more associated with environmental outcomes. These may indicate that the connections between the interplay of food and nutrition outcomes and the environmental outcomes are increasingly being recognized. However, these related policy areas are seemingly still in their early phases. Respondents felt that climate change and agrobiodiversity policies in Vietnam were lacking clarity. The Nigeria and Ethiopia reports did not deal with environmental considerations issues in depth, even though both countries need to increase their production, and climate change and environmental degradation are among the most prominent risks for production these days.

Furthermore, socio-economic outcomes have been seemingly overlooked as well. For example, a missing component from the policy discussions has been on socio-cultural drivers, such as cultures, rituals, and social tradition, or women's empowerment. Women were only mentioned as vulnerable populations, not as agents of change. The youth is not considered much either, although there are references to agricultural youth empowerment schemes in the Nigeria report. This could be due to the limited considerations given to these groups in the original policies or the respondents' institutional affiliations. For the former, vulnerable groups often have fewer opportunities to make their voices heard and may also lack the capacity to do so. For the latter, the Nigeria and Bangladesh reports have not included any respondents from organizations dealing with labor affairs, social affairs, or women's affairs, who may have had a different focus than other ministries or organizations. Based on their data, a high percentage of the respondents were from the agriculture and health sector. There is no information on the institutions of the respondents in the Vietnam and Ethiopia reports.

The two areas mentioned above indicate that there may be less consideration on sustainability and agency in policy agendas than necessary for attaining sustainable food systems. The most recent HLPE report (2020) recognized these two dimensions as critical to food and nutrition security and argued for their inclusion in the definition of food security. For future research, it would be interesting to see if the more explicit incorporation of these dimensions would shift the focus more towards the environmental and socioeconomic outcomes of food systems and shed better light on the interplays among the three outcomes, such as potential synergies and trade-offs.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to reflect on the conceptual framework and methodology used in the Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia reports to assess policy areas related to food systems. Secondly, it aimed to outline the reports' findings and identify similarities and differences between the key food systems policy areas researched.

The findings show that the framework's use generated meaningful data about the policy processes in the four countries. However, it also highlighted some limitations in the way the three broad strands of approaches have been applied in the different countries. One such limitation involved concentrating on key actors and champions at the expense of networks, interactions, and modes of influence. Furthermore, the majority of the narratives identified by the studies lacked consistency, structure, and context. There was also an overemphasis on the actors' power and less on components unique to the politics and interests literature. In light of the findings, the report provided recommendations on how to proceed with future research using the framework.

As for the reflection on the findings of the four reports, the study suggests that their policies related to food systems are increasingly incorporating systems thinking. Interestingly, none of the reports included agricultural policies among the key issue areas that were studied, which may imply a move away from the traditionally disproportionate focus on production. However, there is an indication that most focus remains on food and nutrition security outcomes at the expense of environmental and socioeconomic outcomes. This brings into question how sustainable and inclusive these food systems policies are.

A key limitation of this study is that due to the scope of this research, it was impossible to review the existing food system policies and compare them to what was said during the interviews in order to establish how representative they have been. Therefore, most of the conclusions are based on the respondents' perceived realities and the researchers' analyses and not on actual policy documents.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. VIETNAM QUESTION GUIDE (INTERVIEWS)

1. FOOD SAFETY POLICIES AND IMPLICATIONS ON FOOD SYSTEM

Actors and networks

- *Who are the key policy actors (in the government and outside) which have a say in the policy agenda on food safety? At which level?*

Sense of the "dynamics" around the agenda setting:
- *Are there some specific persons/institutions who can be considered as a champion (e.g. prime minister, minister of health, some private entrepreneurs, etc.) (pushing the agenda) –or is it the result of a combination/interactions of actors / institutions?*
- *Why and how are they considered as the champion?*
- *Are there some 'groups' or networks of actors who are closer/converge/share the same view? What are the issues having the same view? Why do they share the same view? Are there any meetings/discussions? How do they come to the same view?*

Homogeneity/ disparity in the positions of those different actors around the issue:
- *Do you see different actors to have different / conflicting views / interpretations about this issue? Is there some disagreement between different actors (maybe the civil society organizations have a slightly different view) about the cause of the problem?*
- *If yes, what kind of different/conflicting views/interpretation are there? Example? What leads to the differences? When do the differences occur? Which effects do the differences create?*
- *Are there any disagreements among the actors about approaches to address this issue? If yes, what are they and how do they occur?*

Narrative

- *According to you what is / are the cause(s) of the problem? What is the nature of the problem? What are the main challenges that Vietnam is facing in relation to food safety? Why Vietnam is in this situation?*
- *What approaches should be used to address the issues?*
- *Which tools or instruments should be put in place to address the issue? How can we resolve this issue? Which actors should be leading this?*
- *Do you think that the way the problem has been handled is appropriate? What would you do differently? What do you think should be the solutions?*

Power – influence

- *Are there any specific groups or actors (i) wet market sellers, (ii) street vendors, (iii) peri-urban producers, owners of more formalized enterprises such as supermarkets, etc.) that are benefiting from new policies on food safety?*
- *If yes, which specific groups or actors get the most benefits? What are the benefits? Describe, please!*
- *Are there some groups that are being negatively affected (e.g. in terms of food access for the poor for instance)? What are the negative effects? Which specific groups or actors will be influenced?*

- *Who/which group/actor(s) has been pushing for new policies to be formulated? Who has driven the discussion? Was there some pressure from the media, or the public opinion? What exactly is that?*
- *In contrast are there some groups which have been (or are still are) arguing against the way the issue is currently handled? Who are these groups?*

APPENDIX 2. NIGERIA QUESTION GUIDE (INTERVIEWS)

OUTLINE FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: FOOD SYSTEM-RELATED POLICY IN NIGERIA

Duration: 30 – 45 minutes

Break: It is possible to include 5 minutes break. The interviewer (and enumerator) can decide if this is necessary.

Each question below is described in terms of aim, description of approach, and actual questions for discussion. Each part of the questionnaire gives additional questions that can be used if needed to stimulate the respondent to elaborate on his/her answer.

Task 1	Warming up
Aim	Introduction and warming up
Approach	- Welcome and introduction of interview team (Interviewer and associate [who takes record]). - Objective of the study: Wageningen University of Research is undertaking food system policy study in Nigeria in collaboration with Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI) in Ebonyi State. The objective of the study is to conduct a policy baseline survey of the food system-related policies in Nigeria which will form a benchmark for a longer-term policy impact evaluation for the FSHD (Food System for Healthier Diet) program. The results of this baseline will provide a snapshot of the current policy context around food system in Nigeria and the idea is to document the perceptions of the key-actors in food system-related policies and changes in views. You were selected because we considered your organization/agency (and position) a key-actor in this aspect of public policy. The questions are few to ensure quality interaction during the interview. - Respondent is asked to tell more about him/she self (to create a **safe atmosphere in which they can freely discuss**). - Informed consent and agreement with recording (in writing and audio)
Questions to participants	- Note: Interviewer introduces himself and his professional background; and his associate will do the same. - Kindly tell us more about yourself – Name and professional background? (If the name of the respondent is known, we will skip name). - For comprehensive report, kindly permit us record this interview using audio device – though my associate will try to capture in writing as much as possible. - *Your responses to our questions will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes without reference to your name and position.*
Task 2	Entry questions
Aim	To ascertain the general view of the respondent on the importance of access to sufficient, safe and healthy food to Nigeria. To ascertain the respondent's interest on access to sufficient, safe and healthy food to Nigeria.
Approach	A lot of research works have emphasized the important of access to sufficient, safe and healthy food.
Questions to participant	- Do you consider access to sufficient, safe and healthy food important to Nigeria? - Why do you consider (or do not consider) access to sufficient, safe and healthy food important to Nigeria?

	- Are there peculiarities around Lagos and Ibadan areas? If yes, why – what informed your classification? *(Note: focus here is on all the different reasons for considering Lagos and Ibadan peculiar areas in the light of access to sufficient, safe and healthy food).* - Are there particular categories in the population more vulnerable in respect to access to sufficient, safe and healthy food important to Nigeria?
Task 3	**Entry questions**
Aim	To determine if there are urgent policy challenges in Nigeria with respect to access to sufficient, safe and healthy food for all consumers in Nigeria. To identify such urgent policies and why they are considered urgent.
Approach	The principal targets of SDG 2 are ending hunger and ensuring access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food; ending all forms of malnutrition by 2030.
Questions to participant	- In your opinion, what do you consider as the most urgent policy <u>challenges</u> in Nigeria with respect to access to sufficient, safe and healthy food for all consumers in Nigeria? - Why do you consider them as the most urgent policy challenges? - Are you aware of any effort by government (including government agencies) or other organizations towards addressing these challenges in Nigeria?
Task 4	**Identification of key actors**
Aim	- To identify key actors relevant for food policy in Nigeria - To ascertain the focus of these actors - To understand if most of the key actors relevant for food policy in Nigeria are based in Lagos and Ibadan and why?
Approach	Beside Abuja which is the Federal Capital of Nigeria, most of the key actors relevant for food policy in Nigeria seem to base in Lagos and Ibadan. Do you agree? Why do you agree (or disagree)?
Questions to participants	- What different (groups of) actors relevant for food policy in Nigeria have you interacted with and what are their focus areas and practices/actions? - Which of them is based in Lagos or Ibadan? - What do you think led to many of these organizations establishing offices in Lagos or Ibadan?
Task 5	**Identification of food system-related policies**
Aim	To get insights in the major food system-related policies in Nigeria. The relevance of these policies and perceptions of the actors.
Approach	To be sure we are on the same page, kindly note that in this study, **food system** includes all of the activities and elements – environment, people, inputs, processes, knowledge, infrastructure, and institutions – involved in getting food from farms to consumers' plates. It also includes the outputs of these activities, such as socioeconomic and environmental outcomes. Do you know any food system-related policies in Nigeria? We will like to discuss some of these policies now.
Questions	- Could you mention and discuss some of the major food system-related policies in Nigeria? - Are there such policies with special focus on <u>Food System for Healthier Diet</u> (FSHD)? [*Please note: FSHD is not focusing on health only. The focus of the project is on a food systems approach and the effects of a well-functioning food system as found in the dietary and environmental outcomes. Beyond health, dietary outcomes involve the triple burden of malnutrition: hunger, obesity and nutrient deficiencies*]. - Is there any food system-related policy in Nigeria that is particularly related to your organization/agency? - If yes, what is your view or perception about these policies? - What informed your view or perception? (*Note: beyond the answer, interest here is on what the respondent thinks motivated the policy such as political, need for food security, need for food safety, need for healthier diet, price, employment, to improve availability of food, to improve accessibility of food, to*

improve utilization of food, to improve stability of food supplies, national income, popular demand, demand from members of business organizations (MBOs), research findings, need for guiding framework, for the establishment of agency, need to strengthen existing strategies and policies related to food system, and so no).

- Are there changes in view on these policies?
- If yes, kindly discuss (including: Who is driving this change and why? Why do you think the change is being introduced? Do you consider the change necessary and why? When is the change likely to happen?)
- Are you aware of any food system-related policy that was **formulated** in response to the need of <u>Healthier Diet</u> in Nigeria?
- If yes, how would you evaluate this policy in terms of its strength, weakest, opportunity, and threat?

Task 6	Interests of key actors
Aim	To get insights in the interests of key actors in food system-related policy in Nigeria.
Approach	Most of the key actors in food system-related policy in Nigeria seem to be pursuing organizational interest in relation to these policies. Do you agree?

Questions	- What are the roles (*and what do you think should be the actual roles*) of the following actors in relation to food policy in Nigeria – especially, in the light of Food System for Healthier Diet (FSHD)?
	- What do they believe and do about food policy issues in light of their interests? (cite example if possible):
	   o Federal Government (the executive) and its agencies
	   o State Government (the executive) and its agencies
	   o Federal Legislators
	   o State Legislators
	   o Local NGOs and civil society organizations
	   o International NGOs
	   o International development agencies and donors (e.g.: UN, World Bank, ADB, etc.)
	   o Research institutions and organizations
	   o Pressure groups (including unions of business organizations)
	   o Private sectors (e.g. owners of some of the local supermarkets).
	   o Consumers (*It is essential to also pay attention to the role of consumers in food policy and steering food systems*)
	- Given your experience and interactions with different actors (groups) relevant for food policy in Nigeria, what are some of the assumptions and prescriptions assumed by people when talking about food policy issues? <u>Kindly be specific where possible. Mention any peculiar case(s) in Lagos or/& Ibadan</u>.
	   o Are there any specific example relating to Food System for Healthier Diet (FSHD)?
	(*The interviewer would have ascertained that the respondent have had such interactions with relevant actors*).