



Insights for food systems transformation from southern Africa

Outcomes of the Southern African
Resilience Academy



GLOBAL
RESILIENCE
PARTNERSHIP

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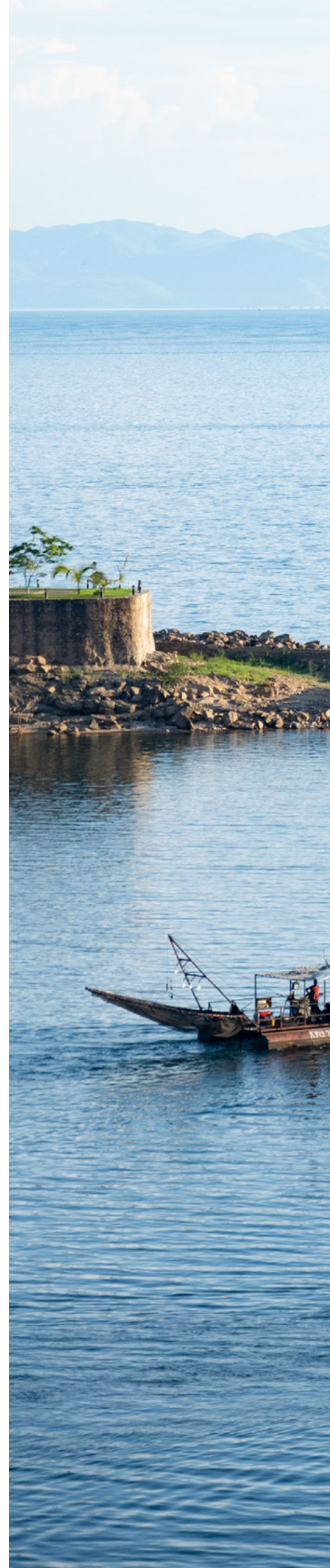
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Images and production

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Acronyms

CRDP – Climate Resilient Development Pathways
CSA – climate-smart agriculture
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FANR – Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate of SADC
GRP – Global Resilience Partnership
ICRISAT – International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IFPRI – International Food Policy Research Institute
SAPECS – Southern African Program on Ecosystem Change and Society
SARA – Southern African Resilience Academy
SADC – Southern African Development Community
Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME – small and medium-sized enterprises
SSA – Sub-Saharan Africa
UN – United Nations
UNFSS – United Nations Food Systems Summit
WCIS – weather and climate information services
WEF – water-energy-food
WFP – World Food Programme



Background

Food systems are complex and multi-dimensional. They encompass not only the production of food, but also processing, transport and consumption.

The millions of people involved in food systems include farmers, labourers, fishers, processors, transporters, warehouse workers, shopkeepers, marketing professionals, regulators, and consumers, among many others. Food systems connect to financial systems, land ownership, the natural environment, health, and cultural norms. Across all these dimensions, current systems are shaped by incentives, power dynamics, mental models and institutions. This complex weave of people, places and politics is the messy reality of food systems on our planet. A simple change in one area may have profound implications for others further down the line. Shocks can drive systemic change in profound and often unforeseen ways, as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effecting change in such circumstances is far from straightforward. Good technical solutions may not be adopted for multiple reasons; they may not make sense in different settings, they might challenge too

many existing interests, or it might be impossible to easily unlock the intricate weave of personal connections that has evolved over centuries of habitation. Transforming such complex systems requires adaptive approaches that can evolve over time to fit the changing local context and circumstances. Transforming complex systems also requires ways of reaching out to and connecting with multiple interests and bringing them together when they may hold strongly differing views. They require processes that encourage people to engage honestly around difficult and contested situations.¹ Ultimately, the transformation of food systems requires a comprehensive shift in thinking and ways of doing, working across multiple scales, and being sensitive to how behaviour is shaped and power is expressed in these systems.

¹ UNFSS, 2021. Synthesis of Member State Dialogues: Report 2. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/07/member_state_dialogues_synthesis_report_2.pdf [03.03.2022].

SARA's role in building resilience

The Southern African Resilience Academy (SARA) is an initiative of the Global Resilience Partnership (GRP), with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

GRP is an international network of organisations and institutes that work together to build resilience across scales, so that people and places can persist, adapt and transform in the face of shocks, uncertainty, and change. One of GRP's core strategies in this endeavour is to strengthen Global South research and practice networks through the establishment of "South-to-South Resilience Academies", of which SARA is one. The aim of these academies is to support resilience- and development-related knowledge production and exchange across regions in the Global South and facilitate knowledge transfer from the Global South to the Global North.

Through its links with GRP and other Resilience Academies, SARA aims to contribute directly and meaningfully to regional and global policy discussions around resilience and development and elevate the southern African voice in international fora. With this mandate, the inaugural year of SARA (2021) focused on addressing the complexities of building more resilient, sustainable and equitable food systems. SARA acted in a convening role to bring together communities, networks and partnerships to explore and tackle key questions around food security.

SARA's role in unpacking the complexities around food systems transformation was executed through three linked virtual workshops, attended by a diversity of stakeholders from across the region:

About SARA

SARA was established in early 2021 and is coordinated through the Centre for Sustainability Transitions at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. SARA is also supported by regional partners such as the USAID Resilient Waters Program.

SARA's core role is to act as a convening and support space for researchers and practitioners working across southern Africa to engage around pressing resilience and development challenges in the region. The academy's main goals are to:

- Strengthen regional expert networks and collaboration in the areas of resilience and development
- Support the co-production of policy- and practice-relevant knowledge
- Enhance knowledge exchange between Global South regions and knowledge transfer from the Global South to the Global North

SARA's activities align closely with the USAID Resilient Waters Program, as well as the Southern African Program on Ecosystem Change and Society (SAPECS), an established research network that connects social-ecological systems researchers in southern Africa.

This insights brief presents key themes and recommendations that emerged from the SARA activities and discussions that were convened over the course of 2021 in order to explore ways of addressing barriers and unlocking key actions to transform food systems in southern Africa.

APR

APRIL 2021

Independent regional dialogue linked to the UN Food Systems Summit

SEP

SEPTEMBER 2021

Futures of Food in Southern Africa: Futuring Workshop

DEC

DECEMBER 2021

Food Systems Transformation in Southern Africa: Insights and Actions Workshop

Emerging insights

This section highlights key outcomes and perspectives from the three events convened by SARA in 2021. These include insights from detailed follow-up interviews from participants and complementary analyses from emerging evidence sources.

A local farmer delivers milk from his farm in Palabana, Zambia to the local co-operative dairy

APRIL 2021

Independent regional dialogue linked to the UN Food Systems Summit

On 13 April 2021, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), together with the USAID Resilient Waters Program, GRP, and other partners, held a UNFSS-affiliated online Independent Dialogue titled, Managing the water and energy we eat: advancing water-energy-food (WEF) nexus approaches to achieve food systems transformation in southern Africa. This dialogue attempted to answer the age old question, can southern Africa feed itself and does the region have enough water to do so?

Southern Africa faces an uphill battle to achieve food and water security. Research shows that roughly 43% of the region is either arid or semiarid and that 70% of its inhabitants rely on rain-fed agriculture². The dialogue unpacked the way food systems can be localised and transformed in a water-constrained region in such a way that acknowledges WEF nexus linkages, promotes regional trade and enhances equity and inclusion.

The UNFSS southern Africa dialogue highlighted six key thematic areas on which participants were required to engage in an interactive manner that allowed for small group discussion, collective brainstorming, and agenda-setting. The thematic areas covered by breakout groups were:

1. Moving towards low carbon energy for food production
2. Climate change impacts on water and food security
3. Policy coherence and institutional coordination in water, food, energy and climate change that operationalises the WEF nexus
4. Advancing technical WEF models, tools and frameworks for decision making at multiple scales

5. Putting nature back in the WEF nexus: towards resilient food landscapes
6. Community approaches to operationalise the WEF nexus

Several concrete actions for food systems transformations in the southern African region were identified for short-term timescales of 3-5 years. These priorities for action include:

- More dialogues that promote integrated approaches linking water and energy with food;
- Data sharing across sectors and across countries, as well as integrated scaling pathways for tools and products;
- Financing models to enable cross-sectoral alignment and policy implementation;
- Institutional coordination, specifically reconciling donor interests with nation states and regional/ local institutional interests;
- Sizable projects to realise true system transformation and WEF nexus operationalisation.

Key messages from the dialogue



Need for regional, cross-sectoral coordination and integration



Appreciate the central role of water



Importance of data sharing



Need for appropriate financing models and scaling pathways

² Mabhaudhi, T., Mpandeli, S., Nhamo, L., Chimonyo, V.G.P., Nhemachena, C., Senzanje, A., Naidoo, D. & Modi, A.T. 2018. Prospects for Improving Irrigated Agriculture in Southern Africa: Linking Water, Energy and Food. Water, 10(12): <https://doi.org/10.3390/w10121881>

Following the set of dialogues and the UNFSS process, several key leverage points in the food system have emerged, important for the context of the work by GRP and SARA to critically answer “How will systems change?”.

The following figures (created using information adapted from the UNFSS official summary³) highlight key points of leverage in food systems where the return on our effort will be greatest.

Figure 1. Key points of leverage in the food systems of southern Africa, adapted from the UNFSS official summary.

Governance

- Governance is commonly recognised as a lever of change.
- The ability of governments to set policy and develop national plans is seen as most valuable.
- Government also has the power to convene. The importance of convening across ministries, institutions and stakeholders is critical, including facilitating public-private partnerships.

Human Rights

- Rights-based approaches to governance were seen as important in official development assistance policy
- The right of each person to be able to access the nutritious food needed for health and well-being is seen as a vital foundation for the future of national food systems.
- Food security and the need to ensure that healthy foods are accessible is critical to ensuring human rights
- Beyond food, human rights in food systems extends to rights at work, and the need to raise incomes and redistribute risk protection.

Equity for marginalised groups

- Despite the major role women play in food systems, they continue to be under-represented, under-paid and often exploited.
- Transformation to more equitable and sustainable food systems requires increasing women and youth involvement in food production, empowering women by institutionalising rights to land and creating jobs for young people in food and agriculture.
- Respecting the rights of Indigenous People and the body of indigenous knowledge related to food systems is vital. This includes preserving ancestral, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge around food systems, seeds, and plants, and with this, access to land

³ UNFSS, 2021. Synthesis of Member State Dialogues: Report 2. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/07/member_state_dialogues_synthesis_report_2.pdf [03.03.2022].





Ownership and access to land

- Acknowledgment of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the need for them to play a strong role in governance processes.
- The complex issues regarding tenure and the relationships between landowners, tenant farmers and pastoralists, are critical to address.
- Harmonise standards and synchronising changes in governance practices across all levels - from the global, through national, to local - is a common theme.

Knowledge and innovation

- Both technical and social innovation are seen as key to ensuring that food systems are both sustainable and equitable.
- Innovative approaches for boosting resilience, innovative solutions to reduce deforestation in value chains, and innovation to encourage regenerative and circular food systems.
- Increased number of smallholders contributing to food systems of the future will depend on the extent to which they are able to access and use innovative technologies.
- Improved understanding of national food systems overview, including key actors, drivers on the food system and how to enhance knowledge exchange across different food system actors.

Finance

- A key lever in food systems is the strategic use of public and private finance.
- Access to finance and credit is mentioned as an important means to encourage economic growth, particularly amongst SMEs and smallholder producers.
- Targeted investment choices can build resilience in sustainable food.

Infrastructure

- Infrastructure is necessary for increasing production and enabling predictable access to markets, both local and global.
- Enhanced investment in infrastructure is needed to support innovation and increase resilience with an aim to make food value chains more efficient and sustainable, while at the same time reducing food loss and waste.

Figure 2. Key points of leverage in the food systems of southern Africa to develop capacity to change through a people-centred approach, as adapted from the UNFSS official summary.

Investing in people

- Develop human capacity to change existing food systems. Education from an early age is key to developing greater awareness of food and food systems.
- Work with people in transforming food systems rather than attempting to impose change on them from afar.
- Enhance institutional capacities within governments to coordinate across sectors and stakeholders.

Addressing divergence

- Addressing the need for context specific and tailored approaches to food systems transformation.
- There is a divergence of views on what to prioritise given incompatibilities between the economic, environmental, and human dimensions of sustainability.
- Awareness of political buy in and navigating resulting priorities and tensions

Balancing differing timescales of transformation levers

Long term reform or trade can take a long time to be negotiated and implemented, and may not be compatible with the need for urgency.



**UNITED NATIONS
FOOD SYSTEMS
SUMMIT 2021**



How will transformational change take place?⁴

Governments' regulation versus individual behaviour change

Many countries are coping with the costs of responding to the dietary-related diseases of their populations. National dialogues reflect the continuing debate about where responsibility lies for action to encourage healthy eating. Many questions are posed and some answers are offered, though the resolution of any tension in food systems has to take account the interests of different stakeholders in their local context. What is the correct role for governments in educating to encourage widespread consumption of nutritious food? Should nutrition-poor food be taxed to discourage consumption? Should advertising or the promotion of less-nutritious food be restricted? Should there be special attention to the food environment of younger people as dietary habits are developed?

Local production or open trade

- Increase local food production and shorten supply chains to reduce dependence on imports.
- Local food production brings valuable opportunities for promoting nutrient-dense foods, for increasing local employment opportunities, for career development, and for creating viable businesses, especially SMEs.
- Free and open trade agreements limit the extent to which a national government can restrict imports with the intention of protecting

emergent local production systems.

- Several SADC member states highlight the tension between compliance with free trade agreements and the desire to support increased local production.

Shifting agricultural production models

Food production can be detrimental to the environment in several ways, for example by degrading soil, depleting water supplies, and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, agriculture practices often evolve slowly, so the shift to more sustainable production methods must be initiated now if it is to be successful by 2030.

- There is a need for environmentally sustainable agriculture production practices, including a shift to agroecology.
- Tensions exist between modernised production versus traditional methods, or between agro-ecology and high-input production systems.
- No single entity has the capacity or mandate on its own to monitor and assess food systems transformation. A high-level evaluation coalition could be convened and charged with a collective evaluation of Food Systems Transformation.
- Create integrated scaling pathways for WEF nexus tools and products.

⁴ UNFSS, 2021. Synthesis of Member State Dialogues: Report 2. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/07/member_state_dialogues_synthesis_report_2.pdf [03.03.2022].

SEPTEMBER 2021

Futures of Food in Southern Africa: Futuring Workshop

SARA's second event convened a group of leading thinkers in food systems and the water-energy-food (WEF) nexus, with the objective of:

1. Enabling diverse perspectives on food futures for the southern African region to come together in a creative, generative process
2. Strengthening the community of practice around food systems and the WEF nexus in southern Africa, and fostering new collaborations among experts in the region
3. Sharing tools and methods for thinking creatively about the future, and enhancing

futures literacy and strategic planning skills among regional experts and decision-makers

4. Exploring key regional goals, "what if?" questions, and identifying important leverage points for transformational change

The workshop focused on five futuring exercises that worked together to unlock innovative thinking about challenges and barriers that undermine the transformation of our current food systems. These activities are described below.

Box 1: Futuring exercises implemented by SARA



The **'Where do you stand?' Game** aims to sensitise participants to their different perceptions and perspectives of the future.



The **Causal Layered Analysis** facilitates a deeper understanding of what lies beneath everyday headlines.



The **Seeds of Change** approach allows participants to identify and cultivate 'pockets of the future in the present'. Seeds (a.k.a. 'bright spots' or 'weak signals') can be small-scale, experimental projects and initiatives that employ new ways of thinking or doing and exist at the margins of current society; or they can take the form of new social institutions, technologies or frameworks that are not yet mainstreamed, but have shown at local scale to improve southern African food systems.



The **Futures Wheel** enables participants to engage with potential shocks, disruptors and disasters.



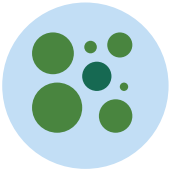
The **Three Horizons Framework** stimulates a structured strategic conversation about systemic change, preferred futures and the interventions needed to shift systems.

A large, leafy tree with a thick trunk stands in the center of a lush green field. The field is filled with various green plants and grasses. In the background, there are more trees and a blue sky with white clouds. A semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the bottom right corner of the image.

**“Futuring tools help us
to highlight our blind spots
and cognitive biases”**

–Tanja Hichert, foresight specialist and SARA workshop
facilitator

Application of future tools and methods in virtual workshop



Starting with the **‘Where do you stand?’ Game**, this activity helped to get an idea of the participants’ general perception of the future of food systems in Africa, and to initiate futures thinking. What this game demonstrated is that the general perception of the future of Africa’s food systems is mostly positive, particularly owing to the small-scale, experimental projects and initiatives that employ new ways of thinking. The development of new

social institutions, technologies and frameworks for understanding the world has also contributed towards the positive outlook.

Despite this positive outlook, there is a shared sense of urgency for collective and inclusive action, particularly to reverse ‘obscenely unequal and highly concentrated formal systems’ according to one participant.

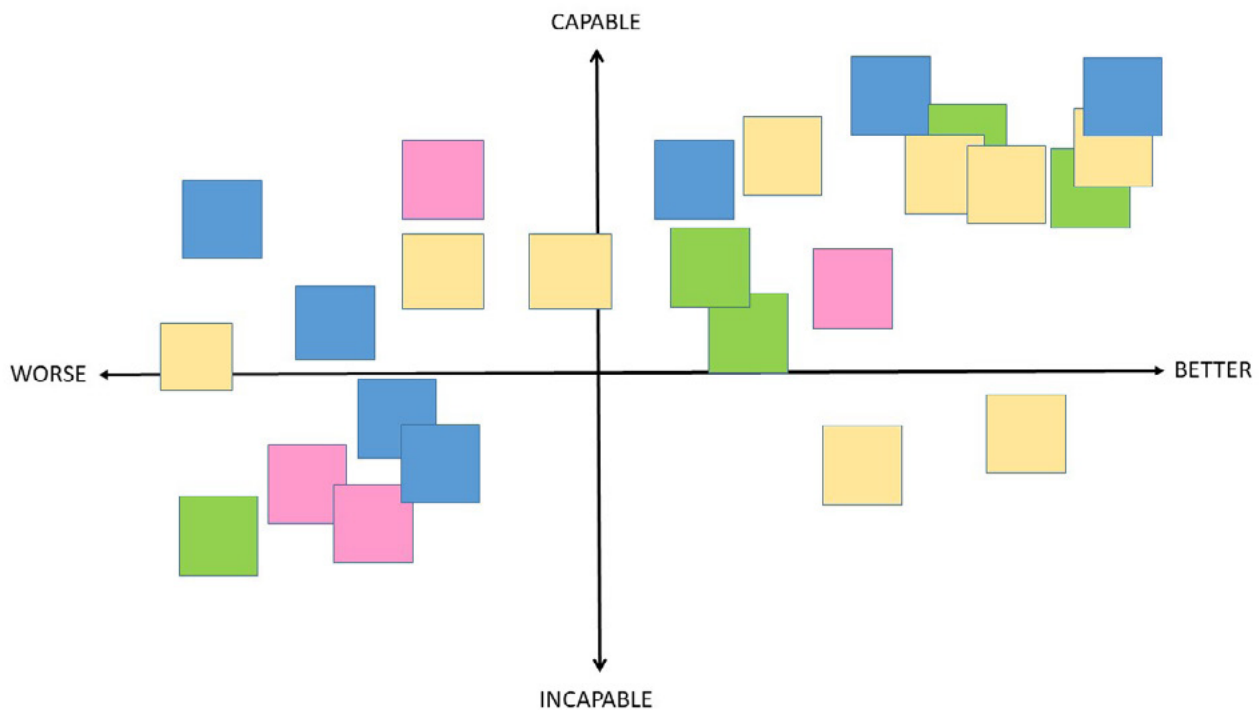


Figure 3. Workshop participants used the ‘Where do you stand?’ Game to identify whether food systems in southern Africa would worsen or improve in the next 10 years, and whether they felt themselves capable of personally affecting the future. The majority voted themselves capable, and predicted food systems would be better. Names of participants have been removed from the cards.

Such disruptors have the potential to foster collective action and build social capital. For example, while typically considered a negative disruptor, an inability to import due to global supply chain restrictions – as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic – can have the ability to positively contribute to more resilient and sustainable food systems. As participants discussed, it has the potential to create interesting opportunities for

Causal Layered Analysis is an exercise designed to challenge deeply held assumptions by unpacking the underlying causes, worldviews, and myths of current problems.

Together, these exercises helped to identify opportunities for change at different scales and across different sectors, i.e. potential “Seeds of Change”.



Figure 4. Workshop participants used a Futures Wheel to assess the impacts (and impacts of impacts) of different disruptors on food systems.



Through the **Seeds of Change** and **Three Horizons Framework**, participants were able to visualise what a transformed food system in southern Africa could look like, including what transformative actions need to be taken now to achieve those visions.

The Three Horizons Framework brought to light some of the activities (Seeds of Change) currently being practiced that should be encouraged to continue and potentially upscale. Some of these include more globally recognised practices such as climate smart agriculture, agroecology and regenerative agriculture. Other examples include local Facebook networks that promote the sale and consumption of local produce, community-supported agriculture and local farmers markets,

community and school food gardens as well as initiatives such as Umgibe. Umgibe is an innovative vegetable box scheme and training institute in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa that provides weekly boxes filled with organic vegetables grown by farmers from under-served communities. Participants also welcome the efforts made by schools that are introducing food systems into the curriculum to try and incentivise youth participation within food systems.

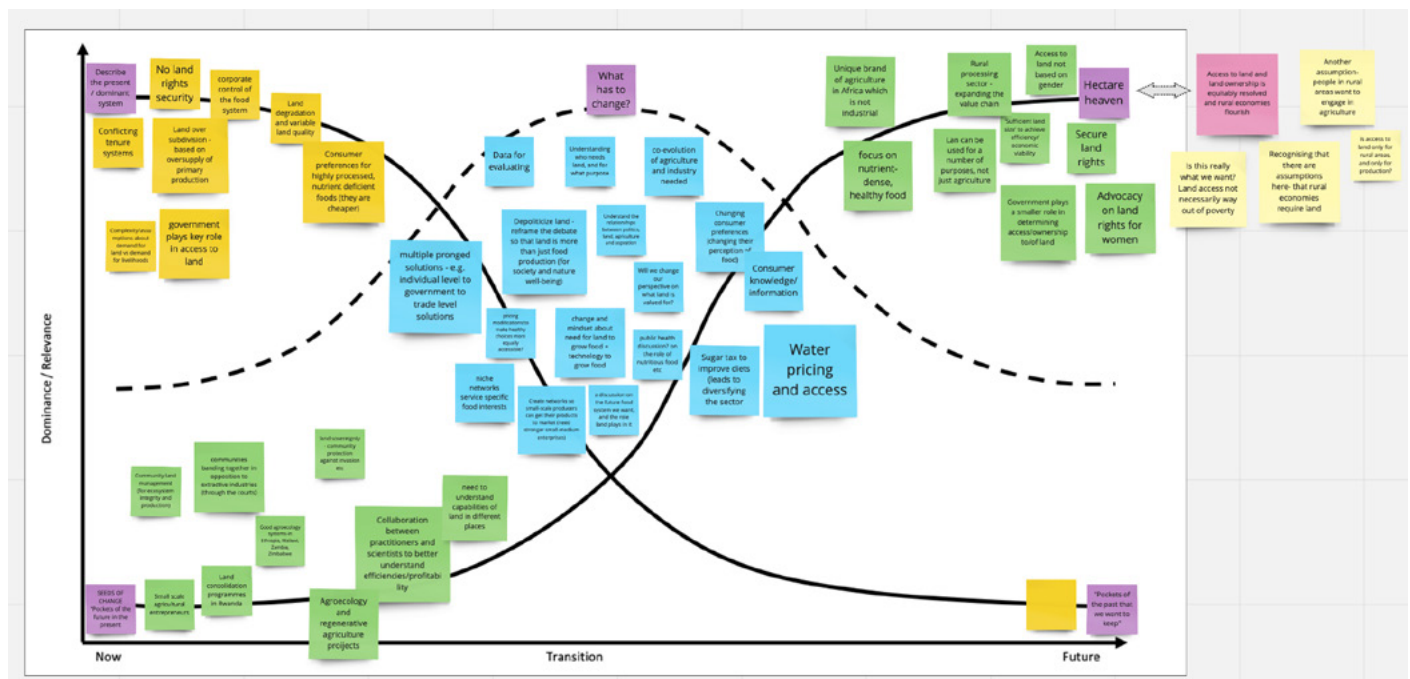


Figure 5. Using the Three Horizons Framework, workshop participants assessed current activities that should be encouraged and upscaled to transform food systems, as well as those activities that should be discontinued.

Key outcomes from the workshop

The use of futures tools and methods demonstrated that not only is futuring valuable in thinking through and identifying deeply held assumptions and pathways for transformation, but it is equally valuable in highlighting the challenges and barriers that lie along the path of achieving our sustainability goals.

‘Pockets of the future in the present’ do exist and have demonstrated the potential to improve food systems; however, they are yet to be mainstreamed. The transformation of southern Africa’s food systems thus requires promoting those Seeds of Change with the potential to address existing challenges that undermine inclusive and sustainable practices.

A key outcome of the futuring workshop was the identification of the following seven emerging domains of change for preferred futures:



Technological
integration / smart
systems



Effective
collaboration and
partnerships



Equality in food systems
including women and
youth empowerment



Appropriate
and functioning
financing



Local, decentralised
and diverse value
chains



Recognition and
integration of indigenous
knowledge



Environmentally
sustainable food
systems

DECEMBER 2021

Food Systems Transformation in Southern Africa: Insights and Actions

Building on the previous futuring workshop and the domains of change that were identified, SARA hosted an interactive webinar on 'Insights and Actions' for food systems transformation. Participants reflected on the year's high-level policy events, such as COP 26, and engaged in a participatory matrix exercise to identify concrete actions that can be taken to achieve transformative changes in southern Africa's food systems.

Within each of the seven domains of change, multiple recommended responsibilities were assigned to the various stakeholders involved in southern African food systems. This includes recommendations on the need to work collaboratively to address the existing barriers to food systems transformation, as well as how to promote and mainstream innovative activities within the food system. The transformative actions required, and the specific actors that need to address these actions are mapped out in Box 2-3.


In addition, the following panellists shared their insights and reflections, including a critical assessment of whether southern Africa's issues were sufficiently addressed at this year's agenda-setting global policy discussions:

- Dr Cliff Dlamini - Executive Director of the Centre for Coordination of Agriculture Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA)
- Vanessa Black - Advocacy, Research and Policy Coordinator for Biowatch SA
- Prof Tafadzwanashe Mabhaudhi - Co-Director of the Centre for Transformative Agricultural and Food Systems, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

Reflections from the panelists and participant interactions are summarized in the next section, which draws together key lessons and insights.



The traditional method of cooking on an open fire, and the core staple food of maize meal

A man in a white shirt with blue trim is cooking maize meal in a large, dark, cylindrical pot over an open fire. He is using a long wooden stick to stir the meal, and a large amount of yellow maize meal is being poured from his hand into the pot. The background shows a simple structure with a green roof and a wall made of mud or clay. The scene is set outdoors or in a semi-enclosed space.

“Our food systems approach has shown us that we should focus on not only agriculture but also nutrition, and support livelihoods, all the while preserving the environment.”

–H.E. Hailemariam Desalegn,
Co-chair of the Malabo Montpellier Forum

Box 2: Transformative actions required of different stakeholder groups within the emerging domains of change, as identified by participants during the futuring processes and reflections webinar.

Domains of change



Technological integration/
Smart systems



Effective collaboration
and partnerships



Equity in food systems/
women and youth
empowerment



Appropriate and
functional financing



Local, decentralised and
diverse value chains



Recognition and
integration of indigenous
knowledge



Environmentally
sustainable food systems

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, POLICY MAKERS



- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting is paramount at all levels to ensure a just transition to sustainable and inclusive food systems
- Inclusive access to information and literacy: inclusion of local languages
- To avoid bias, visioning needs to include voices from a range of institutions – policy, financial, commercial and small scale
- Enhance integration and harmonisation, with more coordinated messaging



- Co-plan, co-design, co-implementation across ministries
- Convene everyone as the custodian of policy and legislation
- More action and less talking by governments and regional groupings
- Need to change the hearts and minds of industry - how to get relationship between policy and industry and get policy to drive the of health of people - huge opportunities in social -corporate responsibility work



- Local level inclusion of communities in dialogues/ discussions
- Local level capacity building through systemic training
- Institutionalise representation
- Improve access to online education
- Improve school education on food systems (children have lost connection to how food is grown and made)



- Assess regulations on VAT on nutritious food and options to decrease or remove VAT
- Set the funding agenda, and not let funding organisations impose their preferred programmes



- Change regulatory frameworks to support SMEs
- Fund appropriate technology to support localised small scale food systems based on producer needs
- Deal with fundamental food production issues
- Strengthen local food systems



Knowledge management should be promoted



Mainstream agroecological approaches in policy and budgets (and not as a niche production system)

SADC OR OTHER REGIONAL BODIES, UN PARTNERS



- 'Neutral' brokers (eg. transboundary water organisations) to convene dialogues around key issues
- Transboundary can be enhanced with uni-visa system (increase inter-regional tourism)
- Support for inter-regional trade to enhance regional food systems at the SADC level
- Energy across borders



- Harmonise food systems related policies and strategies at the national level first and then extend to the regional and international level
- Intentionally doing work at systems/nexus level – this intentional focus is very useful to get a sense of interconnection between issues
- Differentiate regulation at local level from cross-border so not to exclude smallholder access to markets
- Implement just trade arrangements that promote regional food resilience



- National circumstances should be recognised by regional and global instruments
- Enforce stricter standards for monitoring social impacts of commercial agriculture



- Tax international importers – including international dumping
- Set the funding drive, not let funding organisations impose their preferred programmes



Knowledge management should be promoted

PRIVATE SECTOR, INDUSTRY



Innovative multi-partner platforms to better connect value chain actors



Establish organised networks for aggregation for small scale producers for better access to market



Enforce stricter standards for monitoring social impacts of commercial agriculture



- Broker opportunities with impact investors to invest in greener SMEs
- Promote/support small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs
- Private sector investments to drive transformation – including bearing the cost of the damage caused by industry (e.g. a sugar tax that is channeled back into the food system - this will get industry to reflect on their products and processes)
- Make funding from medical and pharmaceutical industries more transparent and share information on diet transitions
- The consumer needs to fund the transformation – make healthy food affordable



Add incentives that favour small producers and retailers that purchase from local/small producers



Advocate for private sector standards and principles and hold them to account

Box 3: Transformative actions required of different stakeholder groups within the emerging domains of change, as identified by participants during the futuring processes and reflections webinar.

Domains of change



Technological integration/
Smart systems



Effective collaboration
and partnerships



Equity in food systems/
women and youth
empowerment



Appropriate and
functional financing



Local, decentralised and
diverse value chains



Recognition and
integration of indigenous
knowledge



Environmentally
sustainable food systems

RESEARCHERS, ACADEMICS, EDUCATORS, STUDENTS



- Learn from and gather evidence for the use of smartphone technologies in agriculture
- Include courses on community facilitation and valuing of community knowledge in agricultural extension
- Implement public health discussions on the link between health, environment and nutrition
- Lead more problem-based research, as dictated by decision-makers and local actors



- Position food beyond the agricultural sector as a multi-sectoral issue
- Increase collaboration between practitioners and scientists to better understand efficiencies/profitability and to change consumer preferences/food perceptions
- Provide detailed institutional support and capacity strengthening, building on the systems-synergies between OneCGIAR initiatives



- Ensure clarity on equity and how this can be achieved and scaled as an approach
- Understand the relationships between politics, land, agriculture and aspiration
- Expand community service learning to include food and agriculture systems awareness and practice
- Promote farming at school to make it appealing to youth



- Explore the potential role of cooperative lending and crowdfunding for small-scale agriculture
- Explore the success of apps like KHULA which helps farmers connect to finance previously unavailable to them
- Investigate the role of subsidies which might favour big agribusinesses at the expense of small-scale farmers



- Develop a new system where local/small scale producers do not have to conform to standards set by big corporates in order to access markets



- Encourage discussions on future food systems and the role land plays in it
- Document benefits of indigenous foods
- Enhance research into non-mainstream food items
- Empower social movements and initiatives by highlighting their roles in transforming food systems in research



- Investigate the role of diets on land and other resource needs
- Produce more evidence on agroecological approaches
- Demonstrate and provide evidence for sustainable food production
- Account for greenhouse gas emissions of the food sector

NGOs, CIVIL SOCIETY



Facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration



Develop local solidarity economies to support availability of diverse nutritious food and fair livelihoods for producers



Upscale village saving schemes



- Use local Facebook networks to promote local production and consumption
- Increase demand for local systems by getting culture and pride into communities and local food systems



Add Indigenous Local Knowledge representatives on advisory boards



Encourage home backyard-based food practices

PRACTITIONERS, CONSULTANTS



- Improve training on digital access
- Contextualise technologies and how to work with them



- Increase bottom up approaches, to encourage the surfacing of different voices
- Collaborate rather than compete for work
- Link expertise and ability on the ground with a mutual meeting of objectives



Enhance learning at the school level on water/energy/food nexus



- Identify and empower change agents (in policy, in communities, in finance) to address systemic barriers
- Intentionally focus on an agenda of equity, how knowledge is mobilised used, rights based approaches, food sovereignty



- Focus beyond technological solutions to include nature-positive solutions
- Share case studies and best practices

THINK TANKS



- Develop indicators/metrics/models for systems integration
- Change the way the information ecosystem works – who is empowered by information? Implement changes at a systemic level



Train communities on circular economy and regenerative agriculture



Broaden the debate around land to acknowledge that land is about more than politics and food production - it is also about the well-being of society and nature



Design new food products using traditional and neglected crops



Promote seed conservation as a risk strategy

FUNDING PARTNERS



Harmonise food systems related policies and strategies across different scales and sectors



- Understand what work has been done previously - not to duplicate efforts and instead leapfrog
- Support multi-pronged solutions - e.g. individual- to government- to trade-level solutions



Invest in practical implementation over longer funding periods, paying explicit attention to equity in resource allocations

Recommendations for food systems transformation in the region

This section presents key themes and recommendations that emerged from the SARA activities and discussions convened over the course of 2021, so as to ensure a strong underpinning on environmental and supporting ecosystem functions as the base of food systems, and unlock key actions to transform food systems in southern Africa.





1
Change the way
information
systems work



2
Enable blended
and local food
systems



3
Focus on developing
sustainable rural
livelihoods



4
Address
fundamental food
production issues



5
Change mindsets, work
at the systems level, and
focus on nexus issues



6
Rethink
governance and
convening power



7
Address justice
and food
sovereignty



8
Engage industry



9
Place gender and youth
at the centre of food
systems transformation



10
Scale and target
financing



11
Support regional
level food systems
interventions



12
Mobilise networks
and social
movements



13
Embrace individual
transformation



14
Adopt futures
methodologies and build
capacity for futures thinking



RECOMMENDATION #1

Change the way information systems work

Transformation should begin with engaging the production, distribution of and access to data, knowledge and information. Current information ecosystems are not only dominated by large corporate organisations, but are predominantly supply-led and in English. Online education and other tools should be exploited to enhance access to education, focusing not only on delivery, but also on how educational materials are designed. This applies to education and capacity building at multiple levels and formats.

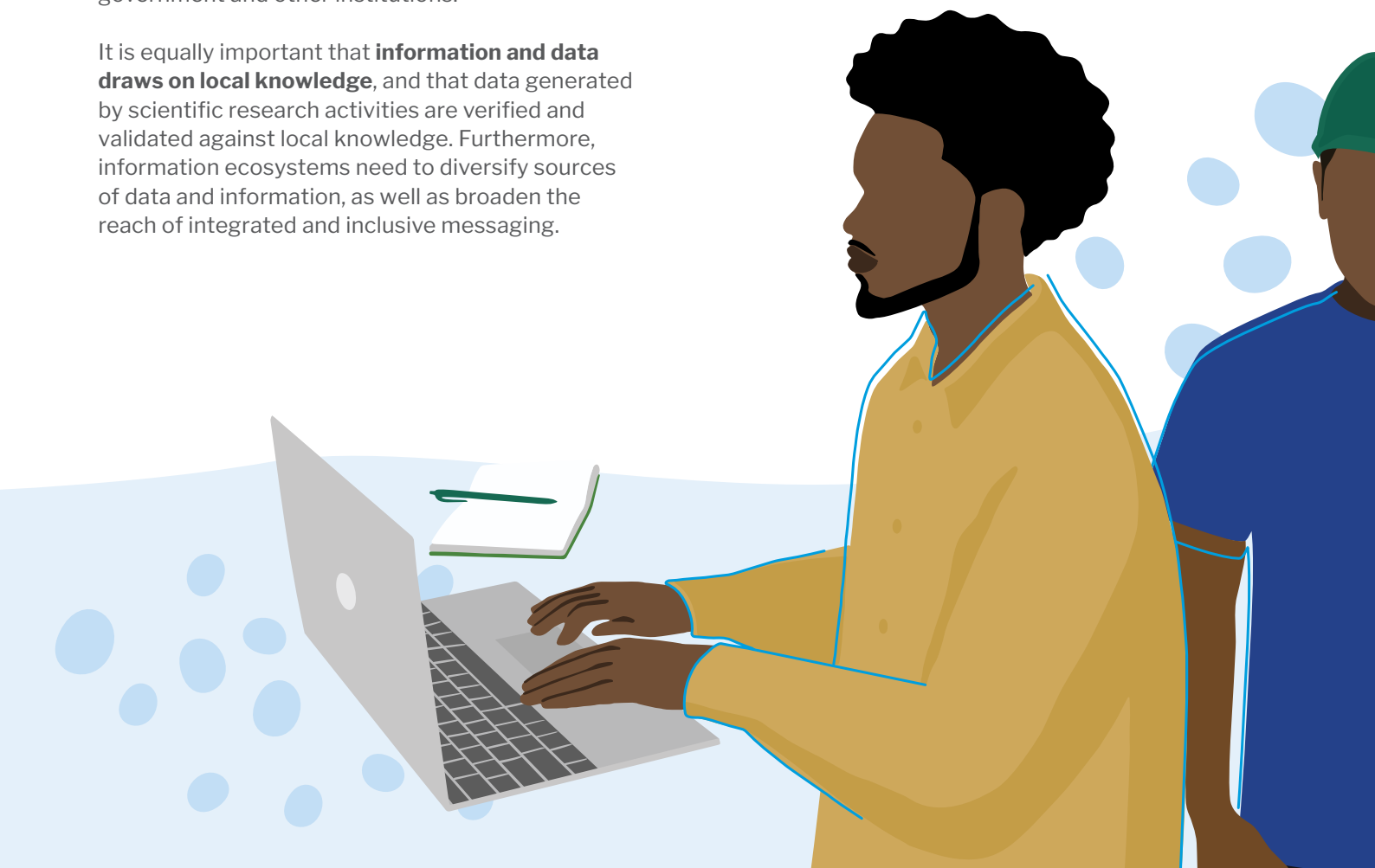
Access to education and information is fundamental to systemic transformation, making it critical that information be made available in local languages and that it be made accessible from an early age. With young people increasingly disconnected from how food is produced and the principles of a healthy diet, interventions should begin at school level and should involve practical elements related to food production and preparation. This necessitates skills training and capacity development, which should be supported by appropriately designed budgets within government and other institutions.

It is equally important that **information and data draws on local knowledge**, and that data generated by scientific research activities are verified and validated against local knowledge. Furthermore, information ecosystems need to diversify sources of data and information, as well as broaden the reach of integrated and inclusive messaging.

There is a need for **greater data sharing across companies, individuals, cities and national governments**. Public and private entities should cooperate through data sharing so that climate and sustainability solutions can come about faster and more effectively. Such data sharing does face challenges, such as a lack of data collection and analysis capacity particularly in rural southern Africa. There is often also a reluctance in industry (and, in some cases, the public sector) to share data that could create risk or diminish a competitive advantage. Even so, the possibilities of increased collection and sharing of data and evidence are endless. A more effective exploitation of these opportunities will be critical for food systems transformation.

“We need to change the way the information ecosystem works; we need to look at who is empowered by information...”

– Steve Collins, USAID Resilient Waters Programme





RECOMMENDATION #2

Enable blended and local food systems

Governance at a systems level will require a move away from centralised and siloed control towards more dispersed (yet integrated) systems. There is a need to strengthen direct connections between local food producers, local institutions and communities. This can contribute to changing mindsets for food producers, consumers and other stakeholders in local food systems. **Attention must be given to small scale market formalisation** – interventions must be carefully assessed to ensure that they meaningfully support producers and sellers. It has been noted that some market formalisation efforts have resulted in increased cost and bureaucracy, ultimately undermining the agency of small-scale producers and vendors.

Ultimately, mindsets and attitudes need to change around food production, the linkage between nutrition and health, and the value that communities and society more generally place on food producers. There is a growing awareness that “intensive industrial agriculture does not appear to be sustainable and does not contribute to a healthy human diet”.⁵ Such shifts tie back

to the importance of creating opportunities for young people in food systems, so that young people are assisted in identifying and pursuing careers/futures in the food system.

Meaningful impact is often achieved most directly through local action. There are myriad opportunities to catalyse change at local level in areas such as markets, land management, water access, waste management and community health. At times, benefits may be indirect: by inadvertently bringing community members together through a project in South Africa that focused on enhancing local food production through backyard gardens, water capturing and agro-ecological techniques, the community independently formed a village savings scheme to procure food when local production was insufficient. Local innovation, and being led by local food systems and context, is critical – ultimately, consumer information, diets and food production should be diversified and localised.

“There is a lot to coordinate at the local level that could really shape things and make things happen, but it can’t be constantly undermined and compromised by a national policy that is going a completely different way.”

– Vanessa Black, Biowatch South Africa

⁵ Dwivedi, S.L., Lammerts van Bueren, E.T., Ceccarelli, S., Grando, S., Upadhyaya, H.D., Ortiz, R., 2017. Diversifying Food Systems in the Pursuit of Sustainable Food Production and Healthy Diets. Trends in Plant Science. 22(10): 842-856. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tplants.2017.06.011>





RECOMMENDATION #3

Focus on developing sustainable rural livelihoods

This was identified as the “heart of food systems in southern Africa”. **Focusing on developing sustainable rural livelihoods serves as a means to reduce our impact on ecosystems and provide people with a good rural life.** One way in which to do this is focusing on guaranteeing incomes for farmers in the context of unpredictable seasonal outputs. Rural development initiatives can be better co-ordinated and livelihood focused projects and initiatives seen as foundational to more sustainable food systems outcomes.

At the municipal level, too, action can support local food systems, strengthen participation and pursue local food sovereignty. Municipalities have a key role in coordinating interventions and exploiting opportunities in areas such as waste management, for example, in ensuring food waste and organic waste is composted and supplied to community growers rather than going to landfill. Water management and ensuring access to water for both consumption and food production is another area where effective municipal support and coordination

is essential. It is true that there are often significant capacity and governance constraints at municipal level, yet partnerships and capacity development can assist in addressing these issues. It is also important to ensure that there is alignment between local efforts and national policy processes. Nationally policies and programmes should support local action towards sustainable food systems transformation, yet in some cases local action is in fact undermined by mismatched national policies. Such challenges can arise when policy interventions seek to address challenges in complex systems. For example, promoting the production of a wide range of nutrient-rich foods is a common agricultural policy goal consistent with many national-level plans. Yet, encouragement of an increased production of a variety of crops, although admirable, can conflict with smallholder realities. Research on household decision-making shows that smallholders put a premium on producing basic staples to ensure food security, over and above the cultivation of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables.





RECOMMENDATION #4

Address fundamental food production issues

“We have a wonderful opportunity in sub-saharan Africa to transform to more sustainable production. Most smallholder farmers are not yet in the industrial phase, farming is still within integrated crop and diverse livestock systems.”

–André Van Rooyen, ICRISAT

A strong set of recommendations centred on the need to support producers and the role of digital services and enhanced logistics.

It is critical that food production takes into account accelerating climate change pressures, and this is where climate-smart agriculture (CSA) has a pivotal role to play in food systems transformation. Entry points for this include:

1. The implementation of relevant **climate-smart technologies and practices** to reroute farming and rural livelihoods to new climate-resilient and low-emission trajectories;
2. The development and application of **weather and climate information services (WCIS)** that support de-risking of livelihoods, farms, and value chains in the face of increasing vagaries of weather and extreme events;
3. The use of climate-smart options that **minimise waste of all the natural resources** used for growing, processing, packaging, transporting, and marketing food, and therefore mitigating the carbon footprint attached to these food losses and waste; and
4. The realignment of policies and finance that facilitate action in the proposed action areas through the identification of new ways to **mobilise sustainable finance and create innovative financial mechanisms and delivery channels**. In this perspective, a co-production perspective must be prioritised to engage a diversity of actors to generate knowledge evidence on potential CSA technologies and practices.⁶

⁶ Transforming Food Systems in Africa under Climate Change Pressure: Role of Climate-Smart Agriculture. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/8/4305?type=check_update&version=2



RECOMMENDATION #5

Change mindsets, work at the systems level, and focus on nexus issues

Given the encompassing nature of food systems, an emphasis on addressing barriers and unlocking key actions at the systems level is essential. An intentional focus on interconnections between issues – a nexus perspective – supports interventions that can drive systemic change, rather than pursuing change that is superficial or results in win-lose situations. In government, there is no single food systems ministry; food systems are by nature multi-sectoral and cut across a number of ministries. Governing such nexus issues can be challenging; there is often a lack of clarity around leadership, mandates and decision-making authority, yet there are cooperative governance mechanisms and approaches that can support appropriate governance systems. Increasing numbers of stakeholders are comfortable with the idea of complexity and adaptive systems approaches, including the necessity of adaptive management in supporting systemic change.

Government, private sector, community stakeholders and broader civil society all have a role to play in supporting change.

Strategic conversations on food systems transformation are required at multiple levels. Such strategic conversations build trust and support shared action. Community-based forums can support such strategic conversations at the local level, but barriers to participation must be addressed to ensure forums remain inclusive. Mechanisms can be developed to institutionalise participation and bottom-up approaches within policy development and governance systems.

Connections to local contexts and communities will always be crucial in driving sustainable change, yet there is equally a need for sizable projects to achieve true systemic transformation and WEF nexus operationalisation. Action at scale is important – stakeholders should work outside the framing of borders and states; there is a need to conceptualise and implement interventions regionally in southern Africa, while also considering the interconnections with the global food system.

Youth have a key role to play in reshaping food systems. National and regional youth movements and intergenerational initiatives can unlock change. Education around sustainable and healthy diets, livelihoods and food systems should start in elementary school and be sustained throughout the education system. There are a range of initiatives that have sought to make the agricultural sector more attractive to youth and these should be scaled.



“The food system is extremely broad and cross-cutting. There is too much work still being done in siloes, and not enough integration and harmonisation. We need to improve efficiencies and support coordinated messaging.”

– Sherwin Gabriel, IFPRI

It is important to recognise that systemic change also requires a change in mindsets and mental models. While a systemic approach to food systems is gaining wider acceptance, to many this remains a new concept. Narrow sectoral and functional divides still shape thinking and action in many instances. Again, education and support at multiple levels are required to address this. Systemic change requires a shift in time horizons and planning boundaries beyond the norms of government and corporate planning cycles.

Changing mindsets also relates to consumer education. Consumers are increasingly influenced by advertising, with strong corporate influence on public sentiments around what constitutes ‘good’ food, the relationship between health and food, and other dimensions. The pernicious effect of advertising can be seen in communities where strong community food systems and nutritious food is being produced, but community members, often the young, prefer less nutritious, mass produced and highly processed foods.

Circular economy approaches to food systems have significant potential to contribute to systemic change. Models are needed to improve circulatory production systems, with small-scale interventions providing an important entry point. Applying circular economy principles, for example, linking small scale milling and baking schemes with poultry growers to make full use of waste and low value products as feed inputs, can create economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, including young people.

Working in the WEF nexus⁷

The WEF nexus approach seeks to incentivise innovative water and energy solutions, as well as promoting food systems that ensure sustainable and equitable water access for the production, processing and prevention of healthy and safe foods. Ensuring more integrated and cross-sectoral approaches to planning, policy, investment and technology decisions must be guided. The WEF approach identifies potential trade-offs and explores synergies in water and energy storage, access and (re)use considering the climate and other related water and energy risks to food systems.

The WEF nexus contributes to key factors needed to help achieve food systems’ resilience: i) coping with shocks and stresses, by ensuring equitable access to adequate amounts of water and energy; ii) minimising the trade-offs in local water and energy production; iii) reducing the risk of water and energy shortages and unreliable access for food producers and agri-food value chain actors; iv) providing food chain actors with a diversity of income generation options; and v) helping to reorient food system outcomes towards a less-demanding future, thereby enhancing both resilience and sustainability.

A focus on nexus issues is critical, however it was highlighted through the events and interviews that there are no political and institutional structures in the region that are conducive to a WEF nexus approach, with a range of government ministries.

⁷ Food Systems Summit Community, Climate Resilient Development Pathways: Food Systems for all beyond 2030. [Available at <https://foodsystems.community/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CRDPs-4-pager-Sep-163.pdf-82a3e965448df34e63ca0df711ee0eb0.pdf>]

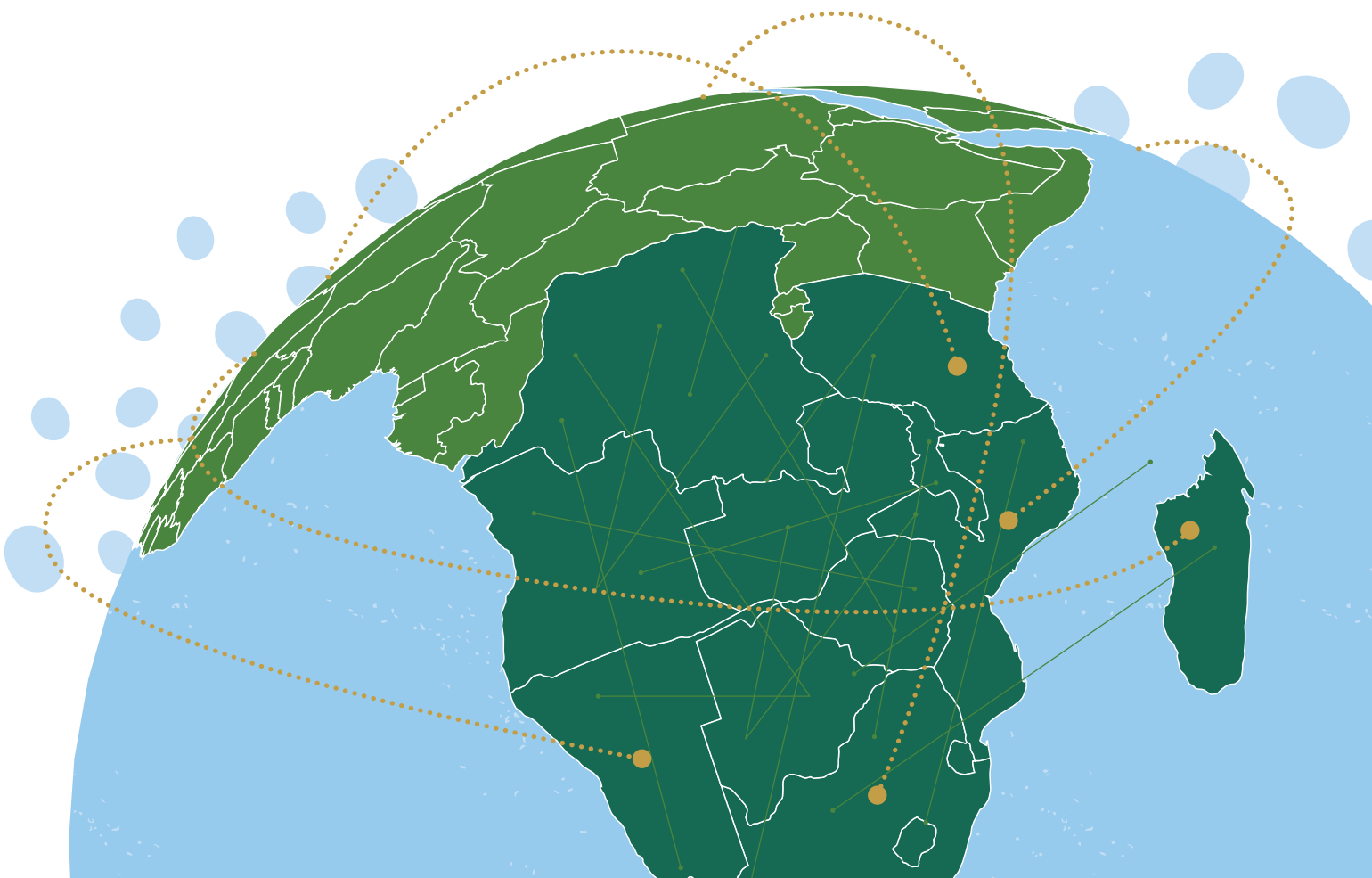


RECOMMENDATION #6

Rethink governance and convening power

Food systems transformation requires effective governance across sectors and departments, operating at various scales (community, municipal, provincial, national, regional, global), and supporting connections between these scales. Transboundary institutions can play an important role in convening dialogue and supporting action. Such institutions are well placed to emphasise and leverage interconnections within food systems and can facilitate the development of inclusive, efficient and comprehensive policies and plans.

There is also an element of critical engagement required when considering governance institutions and initiatives, for example the work undertaken through the FAO Committee on World Food Security and the UN Food Systems Summit process. Some have argued that there has been an erosion of a rights-based approach in some of the international processes related to food systems transformation. When dialogues are convened, it is essential to provide sufficient time for stakeholders to contribute to the agenda and prepare for their engagement. Pre-framing the agenda, while providing structure to the dialogue, also risks limiting the debate and can reflect biases and interests of certain stakeholder groups.





RECOMMENDATION #7

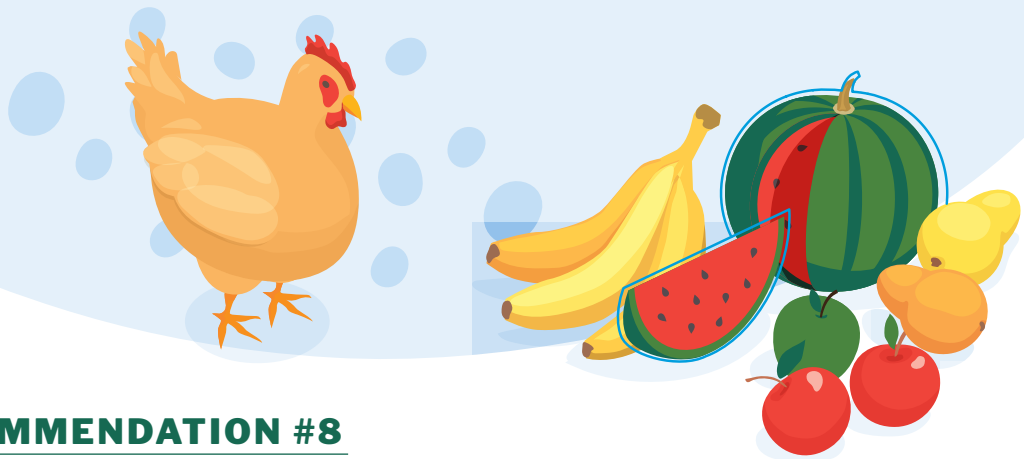
Address justice and food sovereignty

There has been a strong push for food systems transformation based on agroecology for food sovereignty and a rights-based approach, but such approaches have not been universally accepted. There are incentives and power dimensions at play within food systems and these must be considered when addressing governance dimensions such as the adoption of standards, monitoring and accountability for adherence to such standards, and industry self-regulation.

The reality is that power is unequally distributed between individual stakeholders as well as stakeholder groups within the larger food system. **The relationship between governments, the private sector and civil society** with regards to

ensuring a rights-based approach to food systems transformation, incorporating a justice lens and a food sovereignty considerations, is critical in this regard.

In many instances, governments have played an important role in driving a rights-based approach to food systems transformation, but there is a perception that these efforts have been eroded, with **concern around the impact of corporate interests in undermining efforts to promote greater justice in food systems**. Civil society has played a critical role in advancing efforts to support more just and equitable food systems, but their impact can be greatly enhanced through partnerships with public and private sector allies.



RECOMMENDATION #8

Engage industry

A partnership-based approach to systemic change, one that includes the private sector, will be critical to implement enduring food systems transformation. Yet, many stakeholders are concerned about the power and incentive structures at play within the food industry. The current food system prioritises yield, productivity and output, and this has negative impacts throughout the food system, including on health. In most environments, healthy meals are more expensive than highly processed food. Enormous sums are spent on advertising to promote unhealthy food. As a result, the disease burden of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases has grown dramatically.

There are opportunities to shift these dynamics. Within food production systems, southern Africa still relies to a significant extent on small scale, integrated agriculture. **These systems can be supported to improve livelihoods while ensuring that the benefits from such production models are not lost.** Food processing, distribution and marketing systems also need to change. As the region develops and access to non-traditional diets increases, there is an important opportunity to address dysfunctional aspects of the food system, raise awareness around healthy diets, and support a more **human-centred approach** to food system design.



RECOMMENDATION #9

Place gender and youth at the centre of food systems transformation

Globally, gender inequalities are persistent within food systems. **Despite their vital role, women and girls have significantly “fewer opportunities to acquire food production assets, own less land, and are less connected to food value chains either for staple or cash crops”.**⁸ In addition, access to sufficient quality nutrition is critical for cognitive development, and gender inequalities in this regard can have far-reaching impacts. There is no doubt that progress has been made in understanding and addressing gender inequality in food systems. Nevertheless, there are still challenges with building momentum on this agenda, addressing challenges at a systemic level, and avoiding simplistic and tokenistic responses to gender inequality.

Policies, programmes and projects are increasingly required to include a dedicated section to address gender dimensions. While this is a positive development that can highlight important issues, it should nevertheless be emphasised that **gender is a cross-cutting issue that should be mainstreamed across all dimensions of design and implementation of such food system policies.** This also relates to evaluation activities – rather than focusing only on outputs that are specifically framed to address gender, the degree to which broader policy/programme/project activities address gender dimensions must also be considered.

Documenting and disseminating gender disaggregated data is an important part of supporting gender mainstreaming. Gender dimensions must also be considered in the design and delivery of training and capacity development efforts aimed at food systems transformation, encompassing initiatives across government, civil society and corporate sectors.

Africa’s population is expected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2050.⁹ A large share of this will be young people, energetic, and more educated that will all be looking for well paid, meaningful, and decent jobs.¹⁰ Understanding incentives and cultural and behavioural drivers around youth employment will be critical for food systems transformation. Regional growth will depend on a strong and functioning agricultural sector, one that can provide employment for this burgeoning youth population. This also requires understanding rural-urban migration patterns and drivers. Digital technology and circular economy approaches are a critical linkage to youth engagement.

⁸ Betts, J. 2021. Evidence pathways to gender equality and food systems transformation. Available at: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000130570/download/> [03.03.2022].

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1224205/forecast-of-the-total-population-of-africa/>

¹⁰ What do the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit mean for African food systems transformation? Recommendations from The Malabo Montpellier Panel post-UNFSS Policy Conversation.



RECOMMENDATION #10

Scale and target financing

Sufficient and appropriate finance and incentive structures are key to supporting food systems transformation. This also includes business incubation and acceleration support for sustainable food systems; more work is required to identify and scale mechanisms through which private sector, public-private partnerships and institutional arrangements can support actors within food systems.

There are opportunities to draw financing from some of the negative dimensions of the food system and channel this towards system transformation, for example, by imposing a sugar tax and investing these funds back into the food system. Such mechanisms also have the advantage of shifting incentive structures within industry.

There are a variety of innovations that could be considered in this regard, such as reducing or doing away with value added tax on nutritious food products.

Donors have played an important role in supporting agriculture and other dimensions of food systems transformation. In this regard, there is a need for institutional coordination, specifically **reconciling donor interests with recipient country governments, as well as regional and local institutions.** Institutional support and capacity strengthening must be tailored to local needs and leverage synergies between cooperative governance initiatives. In a similar vein, support for research should ensure that such research addresses policy priorities and ground-level needs within recipient countries and communities.



RECOMMENDATION #11

Support regional level food systems interventions

The issue of scale and regional implementation, networks and interventions emerged as critical for transformation. In southern Africa, this includes **ensuring strong technical support as well as targeted capacity building and programmatic interventions** to support the SADC secretariat and specifically the FANR division. These regional level interventions would help to address critical sectoral and ministerial implementation challenges around food systems.



RECOMMENDATION #12

Mobilise networks and social movements

Networks and broad social movements can be pivotal in driving systemic change. **Networks can play an important role in convening stakeholders and facilitating strategic conversations.**

The South African Adaptation Network, a platform that allows stakeholders to share experiences, practical approaches and frameworks all relating to climate change adaptation, was highlighted as a potential model for a dedicated food systems network for the region. The Adaptation Network's membership is open to all who work in the field of climate change adaptation and who subscribe

to the objectives of the Network. The Secretariat is guided by a Steering Committee, elected at the annual general meetings. This organisation structure at national or regional level could be built upon for a specific food system network.

Global movements such as the Food Sovereignty Movement, the Agroecology Movement and even movements such as “Buy local”, are also embraced by local organisations seeking to establish pathways to ensuring fundamental human and environmental rights.



RECOMMENDATION #13

Foster individual transformation

Change ultimately starts from within. While stakeholders focus on addressing change in institutions, governance systems and broader stakeholder groups, there is also a need to focus on **internal and personal transformation**. Questions to ask include:

- What are the things I can do?
- What sphere of influence do I have?
- How can I connect with other change makers?
- How can my actions help to engender thinking and doing differently?
- How does this translate back to my work, my institution?
- How does ‘big picture thinking’ (futuring) translate back into my day-to-day activities?

Personal reflection and effort is required to strengthen dialogue and empathy; considering others' views and interests and working to build bridges to address differences in individual values and priorities, as well as in research, policy and practice.





RECOMMENDATION #14

Adopt futures methodologies and build capacity for futures thinking

Futures methodologies can offer useful insights to drive food systems change, as they sensitise people to different perceptions and perspectives of the future. Such approaches prompt people to adopt a **systems perspective** and help them to consider where interventions within the broader food system can create positive change. Visioning exercises can be extremely useful in broadening horizons and **challenging assumptions** around the status quo and the possibility for change. In order to be most effective, however, such exercises must include voices from a range of stakeholders, including members of policy and research communities, finance institutions, and spanning large scale and small-scale operators from within food systems.

The futures exercises undertaken through the workshops raised important questions for transformation, such as how to function in coordinated, multi-sectoral and cross-disciplinary ways; who is leading the food systems transformation; and where the best entry points for systemic change are positioned.

There was also a strong focus on how to practically translate futures insights into one's place of work and spheres of influence. It was observed that futures methodologies can help stakeholders think differently about the future, but in themselves won't make change happen. There should therefore be a focus on how futures insights can inform collaborative innovation and systemic change interventions.



CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

access to education
is fundamental

who has the convening
power for food systems
transformation

information
sharing

diversified
and localised
production

upskilling

fundamental food production issues

PARTNERSHIPS

building capacity for
futures planning

consumption patterns

systemic change

KEY THEMES

circular
economy

population growth

dietary transitions

behaviour
change

WORKING IN COMPLEXITY

*addressing
justice and food
sovereignty*

participation and inclusion

financing transformation

neutral brokers

YOUTH

SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS

enabling blended and
local food systems

ADDRESSING THE ROOT OF
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

institutional
strengthening

interconnection

*integrated approaches
linking water and energy
with food*

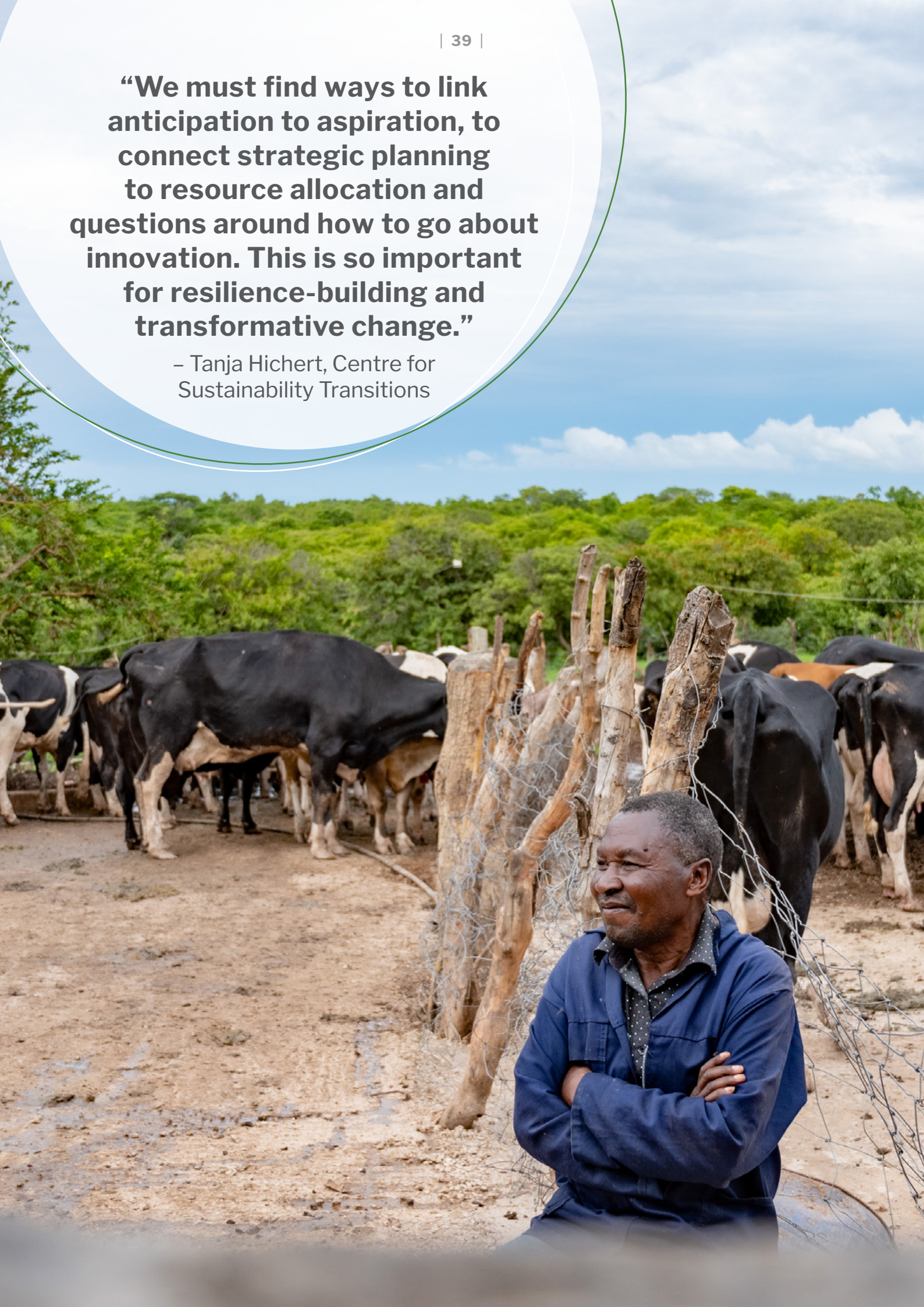
moving beyond the
sector approach

STRENGTHEN DIALOGUE AND EMPATHY

gender transformation

“We must find ways to link anticipation to aspiration, to connect strategic planning to resource allocation and questions around how to go about innovation. This is so important for resilience-building and transformative change.”

– Tanja Hichert, Centre for Sustainability Transitions





Lessons learnt

Based on participant feedback, what has SARA achieved in its inception year and through a deep thematic focus on food systems?

PROGRESS TO DATE

What worked well during the engagements on food systems transformation

- Workshops **engaged voices from different food systems stakeholder groups**, strengthening the food systems network (particularly linkages between national government stakeholders and researchers).
- The multiple perspectives of participants opened up a conversation about how the concept of system linkages could inform on-the-ground practice for food systems transformation.
- There was an intentional focus on **equity** and its dimensions within the workshop sessions, unpacking how knowledge can be more equitably mobilised.
- The workshops were pivotal in initiating the **mainstreaming of futures thinking amongst key change makers**, to support and guide the transformation of southern Africa's food systems. The workshops sensitised multiple stakeholders in the region to potential futures and option for change, broadening perspectives on what is needed to address and plan for disruptive and urgent issues. They served as a platform to **inspire and discover ideas for novel approaches** – especially with regard to the “Seeds of Change” – as well as to share and discuss recommendations and options for action.
- SARA processes, as reflected particularly in the last two workshops, exposed participants to **systems thinking**, guiding many participants away from assessing change incrementally or within their siloes.
- In the virtual setting of the workshops, the **use of online tools** such as Miro allowed for greater engagement.

OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

What can be improved in future initiatives around food systems transformation

- **Creating a more accessible discourse**, particularly for non-academic participants and for those not familiar with online platforms. This includes enabling more equitable participation for farmers groups, for example.
- **Connecting ‘academic’ concepts with the implementors and realities on the ground**, particularly with the private sector and commercial farmers, in order to obtain more specific, granular level actions.
- **Linking workshops and events more strongly to a ‘call to action’ or a specific policy or institutional process/reform exercise**. This includes unpacking conversations around who bears the responsibility for taking key issues forward. It also involves an improved curating of relationships and linkages that emerge within workshop events and how to nurture those relationships to ensure clear roles, support and engagement towards a policy issue in the region. This could have been a policy brief, or a joint submission from SARA event attendees at a major event or within a national policy context.
- Drawing better **thematic linkages between food systems, nutrition and climate change**, and creating a larger focus on practical, **nature-based solutions** to food systems transformation within discussions, beyond technological solutions.
- **Establishing clearer agreed roles for stakeholders**, to take key issues forward.
- **Improving transparency** on how SARA fits in with other relevant initiatives – e.g. UNFSS processes post summit, including the set of engagement dialogues that happened across different African Union Member States as well as thematic dialogues.



Next steps for SARA

In 2022, SARA is supporting collaborative working groups to pursue inter- or transdisciplinary research that synthesizes knowledge under the guiding theme of “Building equitable resilience in southern Africa”.

Building on the experiences gathered during SARA's first year and its focus on food systems transformation, the next phase of the Academy broadens the thematic spotlight. After a competitive call, eight working groups were selected in early 2022 to synthesize insights from the southern African region, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities of building systems that are both more resilient in the face of global change and address societal inequities.

Working groups cover a range of topics and systems of interest, including urban food systems, conservation systems, disaster risk, informality, resilience monitoring and evaluation, seeds of

change, gender transformative approaches, and telecoupling. The groups are made up of a diversity of experts, including both research and practice expertise, as well as a mix of early- and mid- to late-career individuals.

Across the working groups, there is strong emphasis on a solutions- or interventions-focused framing that centers cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary knowledge co-production, and connects clearly to a policy agenda. The key deliverables for each working group will be an academic paper and a non-academic knowledge product (e.g. policy brief, video, website, etc.). These products will be made available on the GRP website.

Timeline and key events

Three in-person working group meetings will be held in the Cape Town area to allow groups to interact and learn from each other. An important component of these in-person meetings is a deliberate integration of practice perspectives and insights through workshop sessions and field trips that encourage research-practice exchange, as well as skills development. During the intervals between in-person meetings, working groups will be encouraged to stay in touch and advance their work through regular online engagements.





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