

INDIA'S PATHWAY TO FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



MARCH 2022

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KEY MESSAGES

- India's delivery of a pathway document for food systems transformation, in advance of the first United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021, is evidence of a **political commitment to transformative** food systems action.
- As a vast, diverse, and highly populous country, India faces major challenges in transforming its food system – though it is understood that the **potential rewards** of transformation are immense. Moreover, opportunities exist to learn from and develop not only national programming but also state and local efforts.
- In India, as elsewhere, key stakeholders increasingly recognise the need to tackle malnutrition, environment, livelihoods, and resilience issues **systemically and simultaneously**. It is not good enough to progress in one area at the cost of failing in another.

PATHWAY TO PROGRESS

Following the first ever United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in 2021, which saw the participation of hundreds of member states and thousands of diverse stakeholders, the term 'food systems' is firmly on the agenda. Moreover, governments around the world have grown to recognise the advantages of tools like national food systems action plans. These plans incorporate public and private actions to improve outcomes across different domains like health, nutrition, environment, livelihoods, and more. In notable contrast to traditional siloed approaches at the ministerial level for implementing strategies or development plans, food systems action plans work across sectoral lines, ideally driving coherence across multiple ministries (such as health, agriculture, food security, planning, trade, environment and so on), while also carving a role for non-state actors including farmers, other private-sector stakeholders, civil society, knowledge leaders, and more.

In the run up to the UNFSS, national governments held multi-stakeholder dialogues leading to the creation of documents called **national pathways** to transform food systems. Some 111 countries, India included, developed and shared pathway documents.¹

INDIA'S FOCUS AT THE FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

In engaging with the UNFSS, India's primary focus was *advancing equitable livelihoods*. Within this, a major emphasis fell on farmer livelihoods and welfare. India held a national Member State dialogue in April 2021 on 'Agri-Food Systems Advancing Equitable Livelihoods'. Some areas of action stressed in this dialogue are highlighted in Figure 1. Speaking at the Pre-Summit and Summit, India's Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare emphasised farmers and farming, India's food-based safety net programmes, the upcoming 2023 Year of Millets, as well as India's dedication to supporting the food security of its people and that of the international community.

¹ Available here <https://summitdialogues.org/overview/member-state-food-systems-summit-dialogues/convenors/>

Figure 1: Selected areas highlighted in India's UNFSS Member State Dialogue, April 2021

	Focusing on backward and lagging regions to address inter-regional inequalities
	Strengthening biofortification and food fortification
	Empowering women, building their agency, and ensuring equal wages for equal work across all genders
	Strengthening safety net programmes and women-led self-help groups to address inequity, hunger, and malnutrition
	Improving access to safe and healthy food for better nutrition to the most difficult-to-reach groups
	Developing consumer behaviour change campaigns to emphasise importance of switching to millets, local foods, traditional diets rich in nutrients, and organic foods; especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic
	Building a robust ecosystem for cold chain logistics with involvement of both government and the private sector
	Linking food and farm subsidies to nutrition and environment targets
	Bringing policy changes to curb or put regulatory restraints on trans-national companies including their marketing practices

While India has separate policies on agriculture, food security, and nutrition, a food systems approach requires more integrated attention to implement planned strategies. The need to tackle food issues systemically is increasingly recognised. Synergies and trade-offs across sectors like jobs, environment, and health are not trivial, and working in silos risks progress in one area driving setbacks in others.

The challenges associated with unsustainable production, producers' livelihoods, consumer welfare, and the environment are often seen at odds with each other. However, these issues intersect for the farmer, who is both a producer and a consumer and depends on the environment for his or her livelihood.

LOOKING AHEAD

India's pathway document is the first step, but detailed national-, state-, or even district-level plans (prioritising the districts identified as aspirational¹²) with multi-stakeholder buy-in have yet to be developed. The agenda for food systems transformation in India is understandably large and complex, with many diverse stakeholders involved. Much progress stands to be made at state and local levels, and consensus-building on the way forward is critically important. GAIN is working with the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), as well as a wide range of development partners and stakeholders in government at the national and state levels, to build momentum and help support the urgently needed acceleration of India's food systems transformation.

A CALL TO ACTION

Despite progressing in recent decades from a low-income to a middle-income country, India faces difficult issues around equitable livelihoods and environmental sustainability, particularly with respect to its food system. Malnutrition challenges also persist, including co-existing undernutrition, overweight, and obesity along with micronutrient deficiencies. For India, food systems transformation is needed to help overcome these longstanding problems. At GAIN, we welcome and look forward to continuing to support India's national and state governments' next steps and vision in this journey of food systems transformation.

¹² The Government of India is identifying 105 aspirational districts on which to focus, based on parameters including nutrition and health indicators, literacy rates, and safe drinking water access.