

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE , HEALTHY, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN MYANMAR

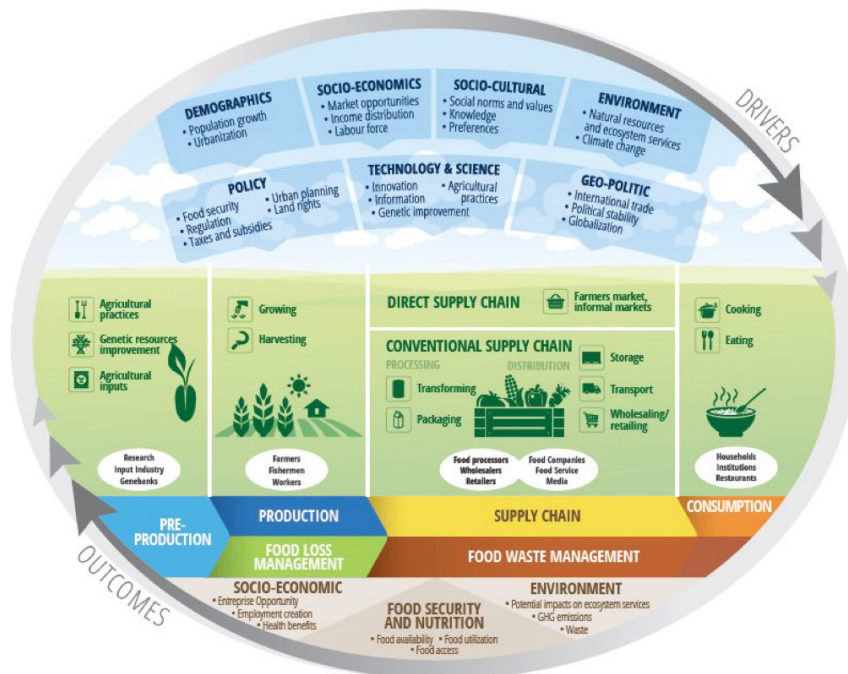
MYANMAR FOOD SYSTEMS, LIVELIHOODS, AND COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has resulted to local lockdowns and international limitations on work, travel, logistics, communications, and provision of services. These restrictions have caused disruptions in the agriculture value chains, greatly affecting the availability of and access to diverse and nutritious food. To be able to move forward and maintain a sustainable food system, it is imperative to understand the impact and limitations surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the resources available to us at the moment. This online conference aims to discuss and provide an overview about the threats and challenges the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing to rural food systems locally and on a regional scale.

KEY MESSAGES

These are drawn from the first online conference series on Understanding Inclusive, Healthy, and Sustainable Food Systems for Policy and Practice in Myanmar held on 9 June 2020. Recording can be accessed [here](#).

1. **Food system is a complex system of interactions that affect our nutrition and health, livelihoods, and communities.** It is at the heart of many of the major challenges facing the world today. For instance, in terms of livelihood, millions of people working in food systems are badly paid and poorly treated despite the wealth that food systems generate. In terms of health, poor diet causes more ill health and mortality than any other risks. Using antibiotics in animals and food processing are major threats to people’s protection as resistant bacteria emerge. Over 800 million people face chronic food deprivation. Low- and middle-income countries are confronted with double burden of malnutrition partly due to the shift from healthier, traditional diets to low quality diets high in unhealthy, processed food. In terms of the environment, food system is a major source of greenhouse gas emission, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. If you examine the value chain, particularly how land is used and the livestock rearing practices and management employed, you can improve them to reduce industry and household emissions.



Food systems framework
Source: www.ciat.cgiar.org

KEY MESSAGES

- 2. The many challenges faced and created by the food system indicate food policy is not yet fit for purpose.** Food policy shapes who eats what, when, where, and at what cost. Rethinking food policy presents a major opportunity to improve nutrition and health, protect the planet and contribute to economic and social prosperity, equitably.
- 3. Shifting diets is one way of addressing challenges between livelihood and environmental sustainability.** It requires a mix of different approaches and strategies, operating across scales (national or global) and supply chains, and targeted at different people and organisations. Some proven measures are as follows: community initiatives that restructure the way multi-actor networks work and connect producers directly to consumers; fiscal measures where taxes or subsidies are used to influence what people eat to make sure healthy food is affordable and cheap and that unhealthy food is correctly priced, considering environment cost and cost of people's health; regulatory and trade interventions that protect children, prevents marketing that encourages overconsumption of unhealthy food, regulates salt, and food labeling; interventions focusing on the context, defaults and norms of consumption; and information and education approaches.
- 4. Covid-19 has disrupted Myanmar's food security and food system. The impact is currently more evident in the distribution system than in the production side.** The supply chain is also affected by logistical constraints. Covid-19 highlighted the need for a resilient distribution system to ensure that during times of pandemic or catastrophic events, the most vulnerable people are food secure.
- 5. Covid-19 has also opened export opportunities for Myanmar's agriculture sector but strategic reforms need to be put in place to be competitive.** Myanmar's geographic location between India and China makes it well positioned to serve as a regional trading hub and a key supplier of minerals, natural gas, and agricultural produce. Smallholder farmers are very important to improve Myanmar's border trade and sea trade. However, production zones need to prioritize specific crops that have significantly high demands for export, such as rice, pulses, and maize. Fisheries and aquaculture need more incentives for export and market diversification. Agro-processing is a big potential for fresh vegetables and fruits sector. Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are required to issue timely export items. In the long term, a clear trade import policy needs to be reviewed and developed to protect local businesses, regulate import of items, and limit illegal trade.
- 6. One of the Myanmar government's priorities is agricultural modernization and rural transformation in each of the country's agro-ecological zones that are populated by ethnic groups.** IFAD, for instance, is supporting three ongoing investment projects that have the two key features: agriculture infrastructures (irrigation, potable water, participatory land use planning, land consolidation) and agriculture and business services (knowledge centers, formation of common interest groups, financial services).
- 7. The private sector has a strategic role to play in transforming food systems.** While such sector is in itself broad, it is important to understand the different types of actors in this segment and envisage their collaboration and cooperation. Encourage those who produce food and earn from it to produce more nutritious food and provide better information while being environmentally sustainable and constraining excess waste.

RESOURCE PERSONS

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