

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

## TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS IN MYANMAR, VIETNAM, PHILIPPINES, AND CAMBODIA

Establishing sustainable food systems in Myanmar requires reviewing past and existing practices in Southeast Asia. This includes looking into decision-support tools used to transform food systems, strategies to integrate nutrition in agriculture programs, and approaches to engage value chains. These innovations can inspire organizations and researchers in Myanmar to undertake studies and develop interventions for sustainable food systems. Policymakers can be influenced to shape and promote food systems policies that are inclusive and pays attention to biodiversity, climate change, and economic viability.

### KEY MESSAGES

*These are drawn from the second online conference series on Understanding Inclusive, Healthy, and Sustainable Food Systems for Policy and Practice in Myanmar held on 3 July 2020. Recording can be accessed [here](#).*

- 1. Build an enabling environment for multiple stakeholders to be involved in transforming food systems.** Collaborate with government partners, experts from multiple organizations, and food system actors. Generate a common understanding between them of food systems to identify top related issues and develop robust policies and interventions. Organize events to introduce food systems concepts, highlighting the role of different actors in the food systems approach. Establish public-private partnerships to conduct research and to build products. Hold capacity building sessions to share evidence-based information and develop policy recommendations that will contribute to the socio-economic development plan of local areas.
- 2. A food systems profile is one way of analyzing challenges in the rural-peri-urban-urban transect.** In Vietnam, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT developed a food systems profile that identified challenges based on the following: food systems outcomes, dietary outcomes, food supply chain, food environment, and consumer behavior. Food systems outcomes reveal varying degrees of malnutrition problems in the rural, urban, and peri-urban areas and underscores the need for a bottom-up approach in transforming food systems. Dietary outcomes show how many food groups households in each area consume and the diversity of their diets, or lack of. Commonly, smallholder producers of diverse crops do not have diverse diets. Therefore, it is important to look into the food supplies chain, specifically the production, retail, market network, and the transportation network. The food environment reveals the kinds of food available among retailers across areas. Consumer behavior shows the demand in terms of what kind of food individuals purchase and consume.
- 3. Integrating nutrition-sensitive agriculture strategies with nutrition-specific interventions results to synergistic and better outcomes.** In the Philippines, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) developed and tested the Integrated School Nutrition Model (ISNM) with national government partners. The model linked school gardening with school-based supplementary feeding and nutrition education in public schools. It applied bio-intensive gardening (BIG), which involves crop diversification, promotion of nutritious and climate hardy local vegetables, and use of low-cost technologies such as mulching and cover cropping (with legumes) for sustainability. ISNM improved the availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutritious, safe vegetables in the school and community. Results showed a significant decrease in the proportion of undernourished school children and in the prevalence of anemia. The mean increase in weight of both girls and boys were also very significant. A survey of both children and parents showed their improved knowledge, attitude, and practices towards proper nutrition.
- 4. Schools are effective platforms for integrating food security and nutrition**

## KEY MESSAGES

interventions, and for conserving and re-introducing local agro-biodiversity.

- 5. Capacity-building at different levels are crucial investments to empower communities to apply integrated food systems approaches.** Conduct intensive mentoring and monitoring of key stakeholders and advocacy activities. Capitalize on the strength of each organization and stakeholder to help them address their food security and nutrition needs.
- 6. Evidence-based advocacy facilitates up-scaling.** Research results and proof of concepts are crucial to earn buy-in of key stakeholders and potential adopters. An enabling policy environment is fundamental to stir systemic change. Relationship building, persistence, and visibility are ingredients of scaling up.
- 7. Organizing smallholder producers into groups creates more opportunities for them to sell their agricultural produce in the market at better prices and with greater negotiation power.** In Cambodia, IIRR helped organize farmers living in community protected areas to increase their capacity to comply with the requirements of buyers. The group's management committee closely communicates with buyers to discuss the quantity and quality of products for purchase to reduce risks. The group also allocates seven to eight percent of earnings for environmental conservation activities (i.e. patrolling, tree planting). To sustain the group, IIRR builds the leadership and management skills of members.
- 8. A market-driven approach is necessary prior to production for a more viable and efficient production and market linkage process.** A marketing assessment identifies products that have high demand and high value and what types of crops should be promoted and selected for planting. During production, climate resilient agriculture practices help farmers cope with climate change and variation, thereby reducing costs and increasing profitability. Farmer groups are encouraged to invest in improving their farming systems (i.e. irrigation system) to ensure that they have produce the entire year. Following good agricultural practices will also generate better market prices and improve the competitive edge of smallholder farmers over imported suppliers.
- 9. In transforming food systems, the transformation of food business enterprises is also integral.** This involves a systems-level rethinking and re-designing of structures, processes, and external drivers of food purchase. Food business enterprises help improve access of people to food that is safe, sufficient, and nutritious. It consists of structures and process in procurement, storage, wholesaling, retailing, and point-of-consumption servicing of food products and services. Food business enterprises are transformed through external drivers such as long-term risks (climate change), un/anticipated stresses (Covid-19), dynamics of macro-economies or markets (international trade), labor migration patterns, technological change, policy environment (tariffs and subsidies), and institutional support.
- 10. In light of Covid-19, there are strategic directions for the food business enterprise sector in Myanmar based on the government's latest policy agenda.** Currently, the Myanmar government's four main priorities are 1) to stimulate the economy and employment; 2) support enterprises; 3) protect workers in the workplace; and 4) facilitate effective tripartite social dialogue. To help the government operationalize and realize these, the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Myanmar assists micro-enterprises in informal business sectors; sustains its business development services platforms; harnesses digital entrepreneurship and e-commerce; and promotes green jobs and climate-smart value chains.

## RESOURCE PERSONS

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