Backcasting

Supporting and connecting change makers in taking systems thinking to action

Introduction to the process
Thursday 22 June 2023

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What?

To imagine a desirable future(s) and then work backwards from there
What do we want the future to look like?

What constraints limit this vision? What innovation(s) contribute to this vision?

pathway-to-impact mapping

ground-truthing, iterating, & co-learning

How?
What do we want the future to look like?

Please take a moment and write down a few sentences or ideas about how you imagine some positive changes by 2030 in the systems that you work in.
How?

VISIONING 1
What do we want the future to look like?

EXPLORING BOTTLENECKS & SOLUTIONS 2
What constraints limit this vision? What innovation(s) contribute to this vision?

PATHWAY BUILDING 3
pathway-to-impact mapping

REFLECTING & ADAPTING 4
ground-truthing, iterating, & co-learning

Adapted from Herrero et al. NATURE FOOD, VOL 1, May 2020; 266–272 https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-020-0074-1.
Accelerators

Adapted from Herrero et al. NATURE FOOD, VOL 1, May 2020; 266–272; https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-020-0074-1.
Co-created pathway maps with game-changing elements & accelerators

Drastically improved local market infrastructure in rural Tanzania enabled by public-private partnerships & innovations make high-nutrient food products locally sourced, nutritious, and the source of local health and pride.
Backcasting: Moving Ideas Towards Actions for Impact

This workshop packet and the online backcasting tool kit have been developed by the team at the Innovative Food System (IFS) Portal and partners at Glowing Earth. The goal is to help visualize a range of food system solutions from different backgrounds to better understand the what, when, and how of moving a food system solution (or set of solutions) towards uptake for major positive impacts.

Overview

The backcasting process helps to define and develop pathways to achieve specific visions of a food system solution being used in a specific place and context to solve dietary and governance-related problems in more equitable ways.

Working backwards from the future vision (2030 - in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)), this process helps to identify the necessary steps going forward from today to turn this idea into reality.

Backcasting can also help to identify and plan for possible barriers along the way, as well as help to identify other solutions and key elements that will help to accelerate or “boost” the positive impact for both human and environmental health.

The end result of the backcasting process is a clearly defined “pathway-to-improvement” map that outlines the what, when, and how of moving one towards a desired impact, and also helps to work along the way.

*See the last page of this packet for a full example “pathway-to-improvement” map from the IFS portal

**Backcasting for Local Infrastructure Improvements**

- Increased local food production and infrastructure creates a more sustainable and working environment for food suppliers and consumers in Bangladesh, helping communities to meet their needs in a more environmentally healthy way.
- Improved local food infrastructure helps reduce food waste, improving health outcomes for all, and enhancing food safety and security.
- Increased local food infrastructure helps create a more sustainable and working environment for food suppliers and consumers.
- Increased local food infrastructure is essential for improving health outcomes and enhancing food safety and security.

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*from the online open access IFSS portal Backcasting tool kit & pathway builder

https://ifssportal.nutritionconnect.org/moving-to-action/backcasting-tool/explore
Accelerators

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Building Trust - the need for trust between key actors in the food system AND in the ability of innovations to deliver benefit to society; Also trust in the processes that effectively deal with intermittent problems or failure on the way to having a positive impact.

Changing Policies & Regulations - fulfilling policy and regulatory support for innovations—whether for the innovator, the consumer, or other food system actors.

Designing Market Incentives - mitigating large start-up costs and/or risks associated with deploying new innovations at scale; recognizing the public policy responsibility to ensure opportunities are aligned to sustainability.

Enabling Social Licence - public trust in genuinely responsible innovation must be built and maintained for innovations to be adopted and extensive public dialogue must be facilitated, particularly to include marginalised actors.

Ensuring Stable Finance - more steady and longer-term finance for innovations to drive transformational shifts.

Safeguarding Against Undesirable Effects - minimise the negative tradeoffs or unintended indirect effects of innovations. Requires monitoring of innovation moving to scale and taking corrective action when necessary, taking into account all stakeholders needs.

Transforming Mindsets - supporting actors of the food system to embrace change in the food system. It recognises the deeply ingrained cultural relationship that many people have with food and encourages transformation of the way that people think about food and the values that shape their choices.

Women and Youth engagement - refers to the need for inclusive engagement of underrepresented but essential perspectives:
- Gender inclusion
- Youth involvement
- Indigenous knowledge engagement

Research Data & Evidence - adequate data is available to improve existing research and contribute new evidence to the ongoing public dialogue. It looks to science-based and evidence-driven models to effectively monitor all aspects of the food system.
Examples

● With SMEs - Eat Safe Innovation Challenge
  ○ To boost proposals with food systems thinking & cross-disciplinarity
  ○ To stimulate moving beyond a silver bullet approach

● With agriculture & environmental conservation stakeholders - Foodscape development in the Central Highlands in Kenya with TNC
  ○ To create a shared vision among very different stakeholders
  ○ To prioritize how to better integrate people and nature objectives

● With governments, private sector & experts - Danish national food systems dialogue
  ○ To stimulate action-oriented dialogue between experts and other stakeholders
  ○ To contribute to national strategy development for the UNFSS

● With professionals and students - Wageningen Food Systems for Healthier Diets course
  ○ to put HEALTHY & SUSTAINABLE DIETS central in the future of food systems
  ○ to CO-LEARN & Co-creation a shared vision and pathway
  ○ to RE-THINK and to link thinking & learning TO ACTION
Innovative food systems solutions (IFSS) Portal

Correspondence | Published: 24 November 2022

Upping our ambition for food system adaptation

Bruce M. Campbell, Philip K. Thornton & Gerald C. Nelson

Nature Food 3, 970–971 (2022) | Cite this article

THE LANCET
Planetary Health

Articulating the effect of food systems innovation on the Sustainable Development Goals

Prof Mario Herrero, PhD | Phillip K Thornton, PhD | Daniel Mason-D’Croz, MA | Jeda Palmer, BSc | Benjamin L Bodirsky, PhD | Prajal Pradhan, PhD | et al. | Show all authors

Open Access | Published: December 08, 2020 | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30277-1

Co-creating food systems change to improve human & planetary health in more equitable ways

An open-access collaborative initiative

https://ifssportal.nutritionconnect.org/

Hosted on NutritionConnect.org
See Video: Introduction to the Backcasting Process & IFSS portal

Click here to watch video
Please let us know if we can help you build a “Pathway To Impact” to achieve your development goals, to plan a workshop, or curate your knowledge products and communicate to a wider audience.

Nutrition Connect is an open access Knowledge Hub for you, convening public and private sector actors in the food systems transformation space, to better Collaborate, Curate, and Co-create (The 3 Cs’s) on what works, how and why, in the race to a shared Vision in the year 2030.

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Thank you!

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