

# TOWARDS A FOOD SYSTEMS-TRANSFORMATIVE NATIONAL POLICY ON FOOD AND NUTRITION IN NIGERIA

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## Key Messages

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- A 2024 preliminary assessment of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition (2016-2025) found that about a third of its targets are roughly on track but that the policy needs to be updated to achieve its potential, and to take advantage of the opportunities provided through food systems transformation.
- Since the Policy would be due for full review in 2025, there is ample opportunity to evolve it to the current context and thinking.
- Some key areas a new national food and nutrition policy must expand on include: legislative frameworks, more relevant conceptual frameworks, resilience, engagement with the education sector, expanded partnerships, private sector responsibilities, wins for climate and nutrition, shifting demand away from unhealthier to healthier foods, food safety, rethinking trade policy, promoting innovation and technology, and being more responsive to the needs of women.



## Introduction

Food systems transformation – the process of changing how food systems operate so that they work for people’s health and our planet’s wellbeing – is increasingly seen as a necessary step to achieving universally desirable goals like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For Nigeria, this thinking provides a significant basis for having a food systems-transformative national policy on food and nutrition that builds on and evolves from the current policy. A revised food systems-transformative nutrition policy would allow the Government of Nigeria to intentionally mainstream the key elements of the National Food Systems Transformation Pathways and ensure full alignment with a food systems framework that prioritizes the integration of considerations<sup>1</sup> for ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all at all times, shifting to sustainable consumption patterns, boosting nature-positive production at sufficient scales, advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution, and building resilience to vulnerabilities and shocks and stresses.

The global momentum generated through the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit,<sup>2</sup> the regional commitment through the African Union (AU) Common African Position,<sup>3</sup> Nigeria’s National Food Systems Transformation Pathways,<sup>4</sup> and the latest guidance<sup>5</sup> support evidence-based policy revision for a more food systems-focused national nutrition policy from 2025 onwards.

This understanding informed the comprehensive preliminary assessment of the 2016<sup>6</sup> National Policy on Food and Nutrition which took place in 2024, and identified opportunities for transformative actions that might be taken in Nigeria’s food systems. This preliminary assessment, conducted ahead of a more

thorough assessment of this policy scheduled by the government for 2025, was guided by the UNICEF Conceptual Framework for Maternal and Child Nutrition as well as a Consumer-Focused Food Systems Framework for Sustainable Healthy Diets adapted from the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security.

Following the assessment of Nigeria’s National Policy on Food and Nutrition (2016-2025), this brief identifies strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and areas for improvement. The brief highlights revisions that are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of a national nutrition policy to address food and nutrition challenges in Nigeria using a food systems approach. Key recommendations are shared, including recommendations related to governance, technical considerations, financing, and partnerships.



1 <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>.

2 <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity>

3 <https://www.nepad.org/publication/african-common-position-food-systems>

4 <https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Pathway-for-Food-A-Call-to-Action.pdf>

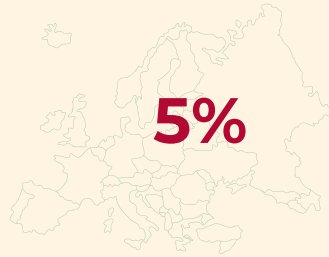
5 High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030 (Rome: 2020)

6 <https://nigeria.savethechildren.net/sites/nigeria.savethechildren.net/files/library/NPFN%20manual%20design%20%20v13.pdf>

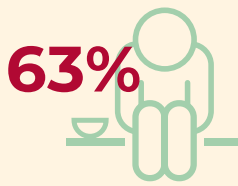
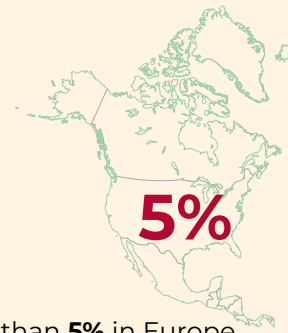
## Background



It is estimated that **1 billion** Africans (**80%** of the continent) cannot afford a healthy diet<sup>7</sup>.



This compares to less than **5%** in Europe or North America.



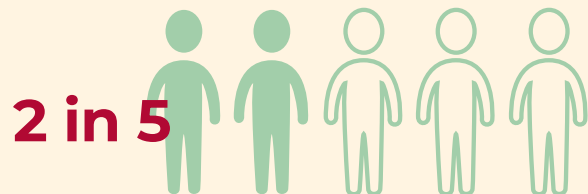
Over **63%** of Nigerians (**133 million**) are multidimensionally poor<sup>8</sup>.



Nearly **80%** of Nigerians (around 172 million people) could not afford a healthy diet in 2022<sup>9</sup>.



Nigeria continues to experience some of the highest levels of child malnutrition in the world, with a stunting rate of **40%**<sup>10</sup>.



meaning **two-fifths** of Nigeria's new generation face cognitive, physical, educational, and professional disadvantage that with improved nutrition, health and care, would be preventable. All of this has implications for the quality of human capital, the pace of economic development and the overall progress of our nation.

It will be difficult to prosper as a nation when a significant proportion of our population are held back by the biological consequences of hunger and malnutrition.

Nigeria is on track to meet just two of the 17 SDGs. Major challenges particularly remain for SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger) and 3 (good health and wellbeing), for which, progress is stagnating or reversing.<sup>11</sup>



7 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO 2023. State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2023. Urbanization, Agri-food systems transformation, and healthy diets across the rural and urban continuum. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/445c9d27-b396-4126-96c9-50b335364d01>

8 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2022. Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022). Abuja, Nigeria. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241254>

9 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2024. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1254en>

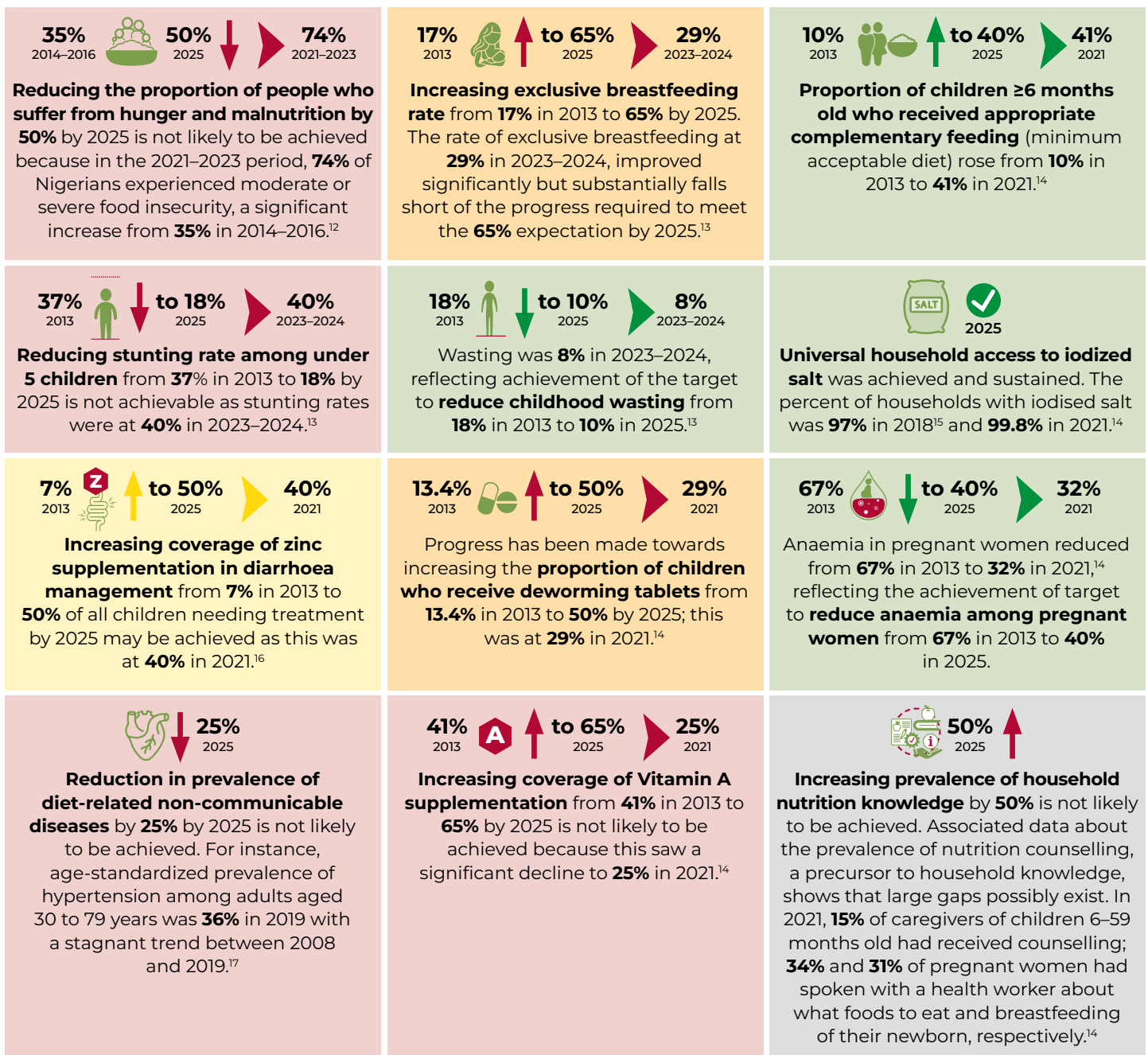
10 Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Nigeria (FMoHSW), National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria], and ICF. 2024. *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF.

11 Sustainable Development Report. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/nigeria>

# Progress towards the 18 targets of the current National Policy on Food and Nutrition (2016-2025)

An assessment of the 9 objectives and 18 targets of the 2016-2025 National Policy on Food and Nutrition to determine its effectiveness revealed mixed progress. Six of the 18 targets have been achieved ahead of 2025 and one additional target would likely

be achieved by 2025. Three targets would likely not be achieved by 2025, even though some progress has been made, and five targets have stagnated or worsened. For three targets, it was not possible to assess the progress made, due to limited data.



12 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2024. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1254en>

13 Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Nigeria (FMOHSW), National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria], and ICF. 2024. *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2023–24: Key Indicators Report*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF.

14 Federal Government of Nigeria and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture. 2024. *National Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey, 2021. Final Report*. Abuja and Ibadan: FGoN and IITA

15 National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF. 2019. *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF.

16 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)., August 2022. *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2021, Survey Findings Report*. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund.

17 World Health Organization. 2024. *Health data overview for the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. <https://data.who.int/countries/566>



**Increase access to potable water** from **49%** in 2013 to **70%** by 2025 was achieved by 2021, with **72%** of the population using basic drinking water services (improved water sources located on premises or requiring  $\leq 30$  minutes per round trip for water collection).<sup>16</sup>



The target to **increase the number of relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of government at all levels with functional nutrition unit** by **75%** in 2017 was achieved. Between 2013 and 2017, nutrition units were established in MDAs that previously did not have any such units, such as the Ministry of Agriculture at federal and state levels.



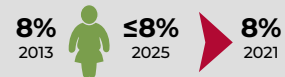
There have been considerable and concerted efforts since 2013 to **reduce the incidence of malnutrition among victims of emergencies**. Nevertheless, there is little specific data to empirically ascertain the reduction in incidence.



Progress has been made towards the target to **mainstream nutrition objectives into social protection and safety net programmes of all MDAs linked to nutrition** by 2020. In 2017, the first national nutrition-sensitive social protection policy was launched.<sup>18</sup> The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development was created in 2019 to coordinate national social protection interventions, and the programmes of the Ministry are nutrition-sensitive. Nutrition is yet to be systematically integrated into all social protection/safety net programmes across MDAs.



The target to achieve **universal access of all school children in the pre- and basic school classes to school-based feeding programmes** by 2025 is not likely to be achieved. In the 2022 – 2023 school year, **0%** of children enrolled in pre-school and **33%** of children enrolled in primary school received a school meal.<sup>19</sup> This is a decrease from the 2018 – 2019 school year when **47%** of children enrolled in primary school received a school meal.<sup>20</sup> The decline in coverage is due to significant increases in the number of children enrolled in primary school without a corresponding increase in the number of children receiving school meals.



Some progress has been made towards the target to **arrest the emerging increase in obesity prevalence in adolescents and adults** by 2025. From 2013 to 2018, the prevalence of obesity among women of reproductive age increased from **8%** to **10%**,<sup>15</sup> but had dropped back to **8%** by 2021.<sup>14</sup> There is little to no representative data about the prevalence of obesity in other population groups such as adolescents, men, and other women.

- Target already achieved ahead of 2025
- Considerable progress has been made and target is likely to be achieved by 2025
- Some progress has been made but target is not likely to be achieved by 2025
- Achievement of target has stagnated or deteriorated
- There is limited data to really assess progress towards target

The transition to sustainable food systems must remain a high political priority for Nigeria. It remains anchored on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution<sup>21</sup>. The relevant constitutional provisions indicate that considerations for sustainable food systems

transformation would require a whole of government approach and as such all the arms of government, especially the executive and legislative arms at both federal and subnational levels, are key enablers for sustainable national food systems and nutrition transformation.

18 Adeyemi, O., Van den Bold, M., Nisbett, N., & Covic, N. (2023). Changes in Nigeria's enabling environment for nutrition from 2008 to 2019 and challenges for reducing malnutrition. *Food Security*, 15(2), 343-361.

19 Global Child Nutrition Foundation Global Survey of School Meal Programs 2024. Federal Republic of Nigeria: School Meal Coverage (2022-2023). [https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Nigeria\\_2024\\_Report\\_R2.pdf](https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Nigeria_2024_Report_R2.pdf)

20 Global Child Nutrition Foundation Global Survey of School Meal Programs 2020. Federal Republic of Nigeria: Program Report 2018-2019 school year. [https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CR\\_Nigeria\\_09\\_2020.pdf](https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CR_Nigeria_09_2020.pdf)

21 Federal Government of Nigeria (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>



# Further findings from the assessment of Nigeria's National Policy on Food and Nutrition (2016-2025)

The assessment considered the relevance and effectiveness of the policy in engaging evolving landscapes, and emerging evidence and guidance. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the policy were subsequently analysed, aimed at re-imagining how an updated version of this policy might be food systems-transformative.

Key strengths of the 2016-2025 Policy are that it is well-structured around the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conceptual framework on malnutrition; includes detailed objectives and strategies; widely accepted as the official government policy for food and nutrition; has shaped multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder perspectives to nutrition in Nigeria; and is strongly likely to achieve 40% of its set targets by 2025 despite some worsening constraints of households (e.g., purchasing power) over the policy lifespan.

Weaknesses of the policy include that it lacks emphasis on healthier diets as a multi-duty vehicle for addressing all forms of malnutrition; does not address key food systems and nutrition considerations, including climate change; has limited description of overarching roles and responsibilities of various MDAs in addressing malnutrition; lacks a coordinated nutrition-gender framework; and has an inadequate results and accountability framework.

Major opportunities that a new policy can leverage on include the rapidly evolving global and regional food systems and nutrition landscape and high momentum, increasing involvement of legislatives in addressing malnutrition, including the existence of a Food Security and Nutrition Committee in the House of Representatives at federal level and in many states, and huge financial flows that food systems mobilize. Potential threats include gaps in understanding of critical food systems and nutrition pathways,

inadequate operational understanding of the multisectoral nature of nutrition, weak multisectoral coordination, and slow pace of funding for nutrition interventions.

The broad primary national development plan that the 2016 Policy responded to was Nigeria's Vision 20:2020, which is already about 5 years past<sup>22</sup>. A 2025 revision of this policy with a food systems lens, however, will be informed by both the National Development Plan and the National Agenda 2050, as well as the National Food Systems Transformation Pathways that Nigeria developed for the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.

The doubling of food insecurity between 2014 and 2023, as well as research findings<sup>23</sup> highlight that transforming food systems remain the biggest challenge for achieving nutrition outcomes in Nigeria. While the use of the 'food systems' nomenclature in the current National Policy on Food and Nutrition is limited, the description of the strategic framework for achieving the food and nutrition objectives of the policy reflects a food system understanding and focus. The range of strategies highlighted remain relevant and pro-food systems across the various domains and if effectively executed as it is, could lead to improved food systems and nutrition outcomes. The Policy's nine (9) objectives are still relevant, but could benefit from better framing to reflect food systems considerations such as needed changes and partnerships across the food systems domains. The current policy does not effectively integrate climate change objectives.

A new food systems-transformative policy will therefore need to address this gap by fully integrating nutrition into climate-related considerations. A new policy must be explicit about the strong need for healthy diets and strategic

22 National Planning Commission (2009). Nigeria Vision 20:2020 - Economic Transformation Blueprint. Abuja, Nigeria: National Planning Commission. <https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/nigeria-vision-20-20-20.pdf>

23 Ecker, O., Comstock, A., Babatunde, R. O., & Andam, K. S. (2020). *Poor dietary quality is Nigeria's key nutrition problem*. Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy: Policy Research Brief 119. International Food Policy Research Institute

connections with people and the planet within the overall context of sustainable development. It must demonstrate consistent content, value, and relevance built around established food systems content, philosophy and frameworks.

A food systems approach in policy development would go beyond ensuring healthy diets and affordable nutrition are prioritized, but also support a system that is inclusive, efficient, resilient, and sustainable while working for everyone in ways that are climate-friendly. This approach will work across value chains and

domains, creating jobs, spurring growth, and building the economy.

Such a policy will need to spur fundamental changes in the behavior of consumers, investors, agri-food sector firms, farmers, researchers and political leaders; entailing a dramatic shift in economic and social incentive structures. The true cost of food will need to be embedded into how markets function and a new policy will need to support a future where all people have access to healthy diets produced in sustainable and resilient ways that restore nature and deliver equitable livelihoods.

## Key recommendations

The policy assessment provides the following 17 recommendations as key opportunities that will help in building a new nutrition policy that will also transform food systems for Nigeria.

- **Embrace the Appropriate Conceptual Frameworks:**

The new policy will benefit from a strategic intersection of relevant frameworks that recognizes the convergence of systems which goes beyond a framing anchored on the UNICEF Conceptual Framework for Maternal and Child Nutrition. In addition, adopting the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) framework would be useful (**Figure 1**) to provide a holistic, multisectoral understanding of food systems that places healthy diets as one of the key goals of the food systems transformation, along with economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

- **Strengthen the Legislative Framework for Food Systems Transformation:**

Many times, we have policies and elements of governance in the form of institutional mechanisms and inter-governmental coordination arrangements. However, we lack relevant supporting legislations. A legislative framework embodies policies, legislations, and governance.

- **Advance Food Systems Transformation through the Legislature:**

A few critical indicative entry points for legislative interventions in food systems have been outlined<sup>24</sup> to help facilitate early thinking and preliminary discussions. The core functions of the legislature, through use of their voice, appropriation, and oversight functions in enhancing budget allocation, release and performance for improved food systems and nutrition remains very critical.

- **Foster More Explicit Engagement around Nutrition and Food Systems Resilience:**

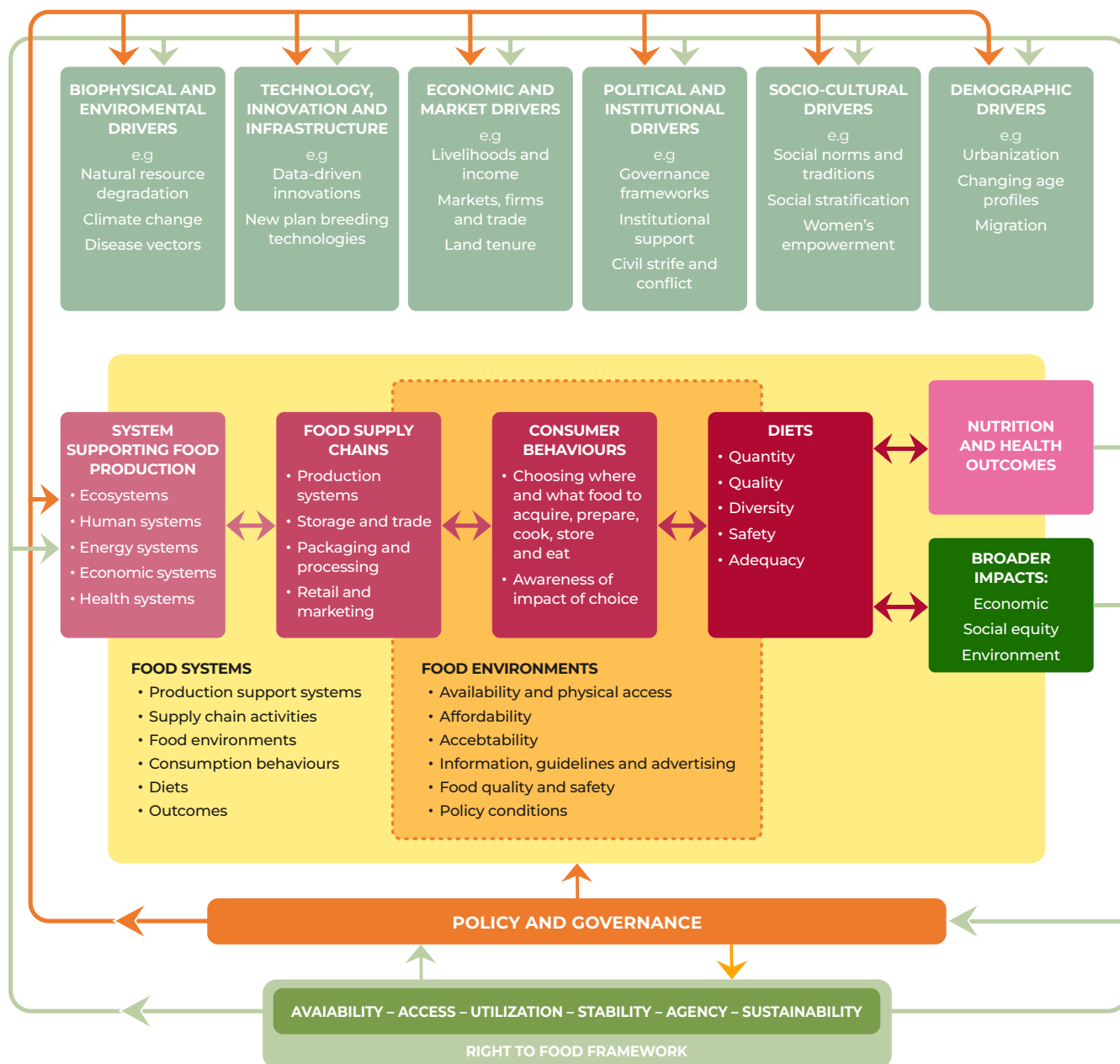
The new policy will be the first national food and nutrition policy post-COVID and thus would allow for incorporating lessons for advancing food systems and nutrition resilience, and strengthening the foundations for nutrition in emergency and in pandemic preparedness.

- **Engage the Educational Sector for Improved Food Systems and Nutrition:**

The content of the current policy in relation to the education sector was significantly limited

24 Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, 2024. A Review and Analysis of Nigeria's National Policy on Food and Nutrition for Food System Transformation in Nigeria.



**Figure 2:** A consumer-focused food systems framework for sustainable healthy diets<sup>25</sup>.

and focused on the school feeding program. The offerings of the education sector for improved nutrition are huge and should be fully exploited as the new food and nutrition policy gets developed.

- **Expand Partnerships for Food Systems Transformation:**

Given that the nutrition landscape in Nigeria has significantly evolved over the years and has had more partners playing active roles in shaping the course of nutrition, it would be

important to expand the definition of international partners beyond the UN, bilateral and multilateral agencies, as in the current policy, to include food systems and nutrition-focused private philanthropy partners and foundations and other international development actors recognized by government. A formal policy-level recognition of the evolving partnership landscape could further strengthen engagement for sustainable food systems transformation.

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030 (Rome: 2020).

- **Strengthening Sub-National Roles in Food and Nutrition Policy Implementation**

The new policy should strengthen sub-national governance at the state, local government, and ward levels, empowering these levels to effectively implement the National Food and Nutrition Policy. Leadership development programs should help officials improve their technical and governance abilities, while clear policy guidelines must specify the tasks of ward-level committees, ensuring their functionality and alignment with higher-tier institutions. Robust stakeholder engagement and adaptable governance mechanisms will guarantee that subnational structures handle local difficulties while aligning with national aims, resulting in inclusive and long-term implications on nutrition security.

- **Develop and Promote Food System Based Dietary Guidelines:**

Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) are shifting to reflect a more food systems-based approach to diets, with countries now incorporating advice into their guidelines on new meal combinations, eating habits, food safety, lifestyle, and sustainability.

- **Promote Better Private Sector Engagement:**

The new policy should be more intentional in seeking to engage with the private sector, noting also the diversity and complexity in private-sector operations of various scales across value chains. It must consider the roles and responsibilities of the private sector in shaping the food environment of Nigerians.

- **Establish Alignment with Climate-Smart Principles for Improved Nutrition:**

Guided by the Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation<sup>26</sup>, ten priority key climate-smart food systems actions have

been contextualized for consideration. These include actions to increase affordability, improve livelihoods, enhance resilience, advance gender parity, and protect and restore nature. Also included are actions to scale up sustainable land use and management practices, reduce GHG emissions, reduce food loss and waste, accelerate innovation and realign public financial and policy incentives.

- **Take a Stronger Stand against Unhealthy Foods and Advance Explicit and Intentional Promotion of Fruits and Vegetables:**

A food systems-transformative nutrition policy that aims to transform markets for improved nutrition must be explicit about strategies and actions to help reduce the consumption of unhealthy foods. It must also be deliberate about promoting the production, processing, marketing, and consumption of fruits and vegetables among other healthy foods.

- **Advance Food Safety within the Context of One Health Framework:**

The new policy should expand on the current food safety agenda in line with the One Health Framework for Food Safety<sup>27</sup>, which highlights important dimensions for consideration. The framework essentially promotes an integrated approach to addressing health and food safety considerations in humans, animals and the ecosystem. This framework will require at a minimum ensuring the ministries and sectors of health, agriculture, environment, water resources, rural and urban development work together. It also requires collaboration with the academia, research communities, NGOs and the private sector amongst others. The revised nutrition policy can better shape trade and economic development by

26 Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation. 2024. Transforming Food Systems for People, Nature and Climate. <https://allianceofchampions.org/>

27 The One Health Framework promotes an integrated approach to address health and food safety considerations in humans, animals, and the ecosystem.

promoting sanitary, phytosanitary and standard hygiene conditions for food and nutritious commodities for domestic consumption as well as export.

- **Promote Trade for Food Systems**

**Transformation and Improved Nutrition:**

Some trade policies need to be re-thought to support sustainable food systems and healthy diets. This is extremely important for Nigeria considering the volume of annual imports and the evolving dynamics of cross border trade on food. Through appropriate standards, regulations and incentives, trade policies can align with the goal of providing healthy and sustainable diets for all.

- **Promote Technology, Innovation, and Infrastructure:**

The new policy needs to pay attention to a wider spectrum of technologies and innovations especially in acknowledging the force and significance of the digital age, its transformative powers, and implications for food systems transformation. Embracing digital innovations such as decision science tools and blockchain technologies can support better data generation, sharing and use while promoting more transparency, accountability, traceability and timeliness in response and actions critical for food quality and healthiness. Efforts to transform food systems must consider infrastructure needs.

- **Engage around the Trends of Urbanization and Population Growth:**

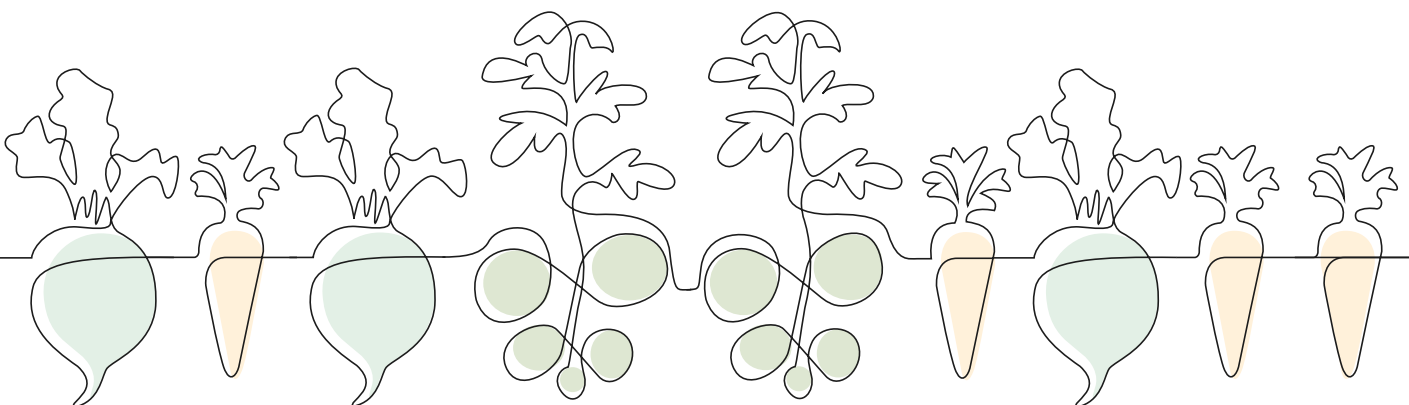
The evolving health, nutrition, demographic transitions, and urbanization trends should evoke appropriate nutrition policy responses. For example, policies to provide for school-age children must account for the rate at which this demographic group is growing and ensure budgeting grows in a corresponding way.

- **Promote Linkages of Nutrition, Gender, and Food Systems:**

Policy frameworks that support food systems transformation for improved nutrition need to be deliberate about gender responsiveness, intentionality, and transformativeness. Where women still face unequal access to resources, information, even fundamental human rights, everyone is held back.

- **Strengthen Policy Review and Execution Excellence Considerations:**

The different annual sectoral assessments of nutrition must be mandated with specified content and process standards to feed into the annual multisectoral nutrition policy review to be convened by the Vice President. This allows the Vice President as the Chair of the National Council on Nutrition to drive accountability for policy execution across all relevant sectors. Engaging at the right levels can ensure that new policy goes beyond being some assemblage of general aspirational statements, to becoming a more enabling and enforceable policy through established and innovative accountability mechanisms.





## Conclusion

A new, food systems-transformative National Policy on Food and Nutrition provides a unique opportunity for strengthening governance, institutions, legislations, and partnerships for sustainable food systems transformation and improved nutrition as Nigeria moves from broadly aspirational policies to more enabling and enforceable instruments. The executive level systems through the Presidency, National Council on Nutrition, State Governors, National and State level Committees on Food and Nutrition as well as the various multisectoral ministries, departments, and agencies at various levels must continue to anchor nutrition policy development and execution. These systems remain critical and foundational for advancing a better integration of food systems transformation into national nutrition policy.

Engagement and familiarity with food systems thinking and processes is gradually gaining ground with the legislature at both federal and state levels.

These legislative structures represent significant opportunities for the advancement of food systems-transformative nutrition policies. Having a House of Representatives Committee dedicated to advancing food and nutrition security is a strong development that further amplifies the important role of the legislature in improving food systems for enhanced food and nutrition security. The potential impact of having a State House of Assembly Committee in every state dedicated to Food Security and Nutrition would be simply huge.

Working with the executive arm of government and other partners at various levels, the legislature at national and subnational levels must effectively deploy their powers to advance food systems transformation for improved nutrition as an urgent matter of national security and sovereignty.

And having a *food systems-transformative* National Food and Nutrition Policy in 2025 will be a critical step in support of this.



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