

ZAAB

Zambia Alliance For Agroecology & Biodiversity

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The need for Cohesive Food Policies in Zambia to guide the transition to a just and sustainable food system for all

**By The Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity
and farmer, research and CSO partners**

Part of the Common Food Policy for Africa Initiative with the African Union

Background

The recent Global Health Index shows that billions of people are going hungry everyday and yet huge amounts of food is wasted due to systemic failures in the dominant global industrial food system (and not a lack of food production as is frequently misrepresented). It showed that food systems are at the core of the world's intersected problems of poor health, poverty, climate change and justice. Food systems are at the same time public health, agriculture, environment, climate and economic issues. They are the world's central development concern in fact.

Addressing food system failures means understanding and working with all the components that relate to food: people, places, resources, relationships, practices and politics. It requires coordination over all components *and* the various policy domains, including agriculture, health, transport, trade and commerce, socio-economic development, and environment; in order to tackle the structural drivers of food insecurity (like power asymmetries, corporate control and concentration, import dependencies, harmful agrochemical inputs and environmental degradation). These structural drivers are entrenched within the dominant global food system.

What's driving the vicious cycle of unsustainable food systems and unsustainable debt?

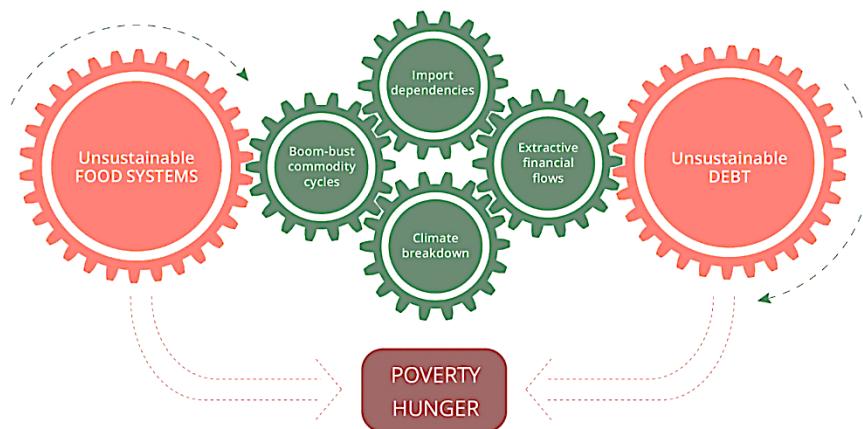


Figure 1: Breaking the cycle of unsustainable food systems, hunger, and debt - food systems experts sound warning, IPES-FOOD, March 2023

From diversity to uniformity - how did we get here?

There are a lot of diverse food systems around the world, but the last decades a few powerful actors have been pushing for a standardization of food across all regions. The now dominant system is referred to as the 'global food system'. It is the result of this process of standardisation. It is based on an agro-industrial model, consisting of increasingly globalized corporate value chains and supported by liberalised trade and investment agreements.

Characteristics of the global food system

The dominant agro-industrial system treats food as an object of sale not a human right.

It orientates production towards global trade – producing for export, and importing to produce, eat and feed livestock. The expansion of this global food system goes hand in hand with corporate control - and works in favour of a few powerful countries, the large corporations themselves and the world's top 1% rich that promote them. It locks colonial imperialism in place, ensuring extraction from southern countries and people that remain dependant, indebted and impoverished.

At the same time, it marginalises other existing food systems, like our local Zambian food system, which is much more sustainable, healthy, and economically beneficial for us.

Reaching crisis levels

The agro-industrial food system is:

1. Driving climate change. It is the most polluting industry on earth, accounting for at least 50% of global emissions due to wasteful trade. It means countries routinely import and export the same products. Seemingly senseless examples include:
 - The USA imports 1.4 million tons of beef per year and exports 1.4 million tons of beef per year. The UK exports 270 million litres of milk and imports 170 million litres of milk. In 2007 Britain and Australia exchanged 20 tons of bottled water
 - Global food travels hundreds of thousands of miles to be processed - 1/2 of Alaskan seafood is processed in China and then sent straight back to American supermarkets. Argentinian pears are packed in Thailand and sold in the USA
 - Commercial ships produce over 1 million tons of CO₂ per day and this is not being counted in countries National Determined Contributions to Climate Change.
 - Long-distance transport means food needs processing, chemicals, packaging, and energy-intensive logistics to keep it 'fresh'.

2. Making food produces hungry, extremely vulnerable to price fluctuations and distribution failures (with increasing crises such as with COVID and global conflicts like Ukraine), indebted, threatened by land grabs, environmental degradation, climate volatility and dependant on government handouts.
3. Making consumers increasingly food insecure and sick – 3 billion people worldwide are now suffering from food related insecurity and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). NDCs are the cause of 74% of all deaths globally - 41 million people each year ([WHO](#)). 52% of Africa's population are now food insecure (AU).

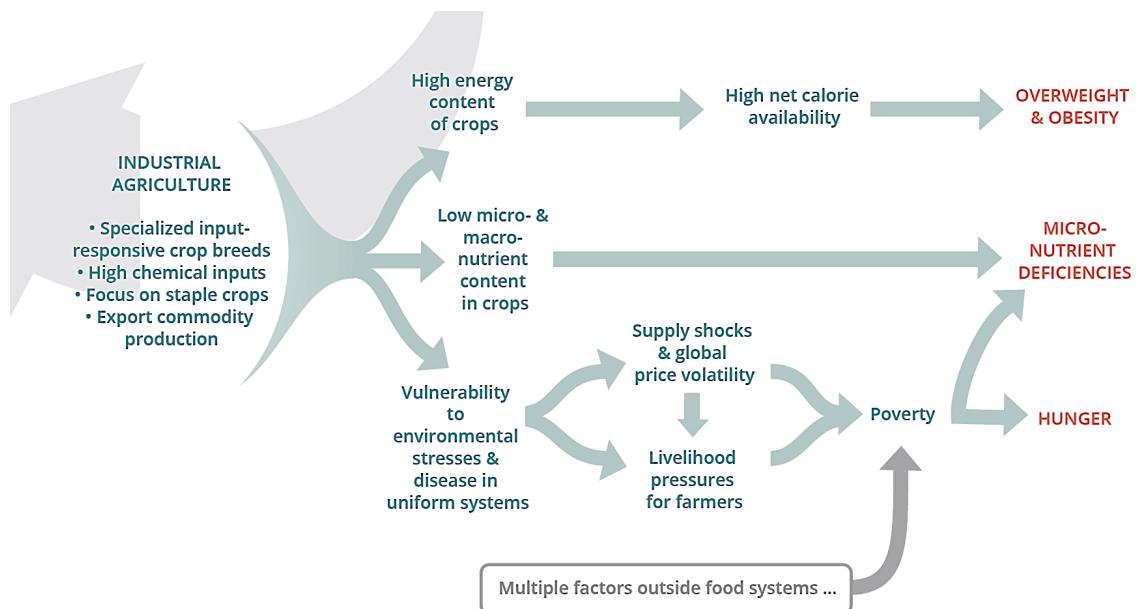


Figure 2: How malnutrition persists in agro-industrial food system. IPES-FOOD (2019)

The world has committed to change – It is now up to individual countries to make it happen

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-FOOD), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Committee on Food Security (CFS), The Global Alliance for The Future Of Food, have all called for an URGENT need to transition to sustainable diverse food systems based on agroecological smallholder farming systems and localised territorial markets. Because:

- Smallholder farms support 95% of the world's agricultural biodiversity (which Zambia has committed to protect through signature to the binding ITPGRFA)
- They produce 80% of the world's food on a quarter of the land area¹ and resources
- Agroecology and local diverse food systems restore soils, ecosystems and biodiversity – therefore mitigating climate change.
- Agroecology produces more food per acre, creates more fulfilling jobs and resilient communities, treats animals more ethically, and provide sustainable, healthy food.
- In local diverse agroecological food systems, farmers take home 80% of retail price from local farmers' markets.

Shifting back to diversity - what this means for Zambia?

Zambia has committed to transitioning to sustainable food systems to achieve: its climate obligations for mitigation and adaptation; the 2030 agenda and SDGs, especially related to health, malnutrition and equity; and curb rural biodiversity loss (including agro-biodiversity). The Government of Zambia has committed to several internationally binding agreements to this end (UN FCCC, UN CBD, UN FAO ITPGRFA).

However, Zambia lacks comprehensive and cohesive policy frameworks to put this in place. At the same time, there are several current proposals for new and amended policy frameworks and institutional arrangements being put forward that are ill suited to supporting a transition – and instead will further lock in the agro-industrial food system.

These need to be halted.

Zaab and its multiple partners, are particularly concerned with THREE specific ongoing policy processes, including:

1. Proposed Amendment to the PBR Act to harmonize with UPOV 91 standards
2. Development of the Agriculture Transformation Agency (ATA) – a supra-ministerial agency, and the *Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme (CATSP)*
3. *Development of a new Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy*

All three of these processes are facilitated harmonization agendas, being driven by and in the interest of a few powerful countries and large corporations, through 'charitable' development investments.

¹ <http://www.grain.org/attachments/3011/download>

Before any changes can take place Zambia needs a comprehensive fully inclusive process to develop holistic food system governance mechanisms and guiding food policy.

- This should define the vision and goals to address the imperatives to boost food and nutritional security, grow rural economies, protect biodiversity, address climate change and build a sustainable green economy - with smallholder farmers and diverse agroecological production as a key starting point (*as we have committed in international agreements*).
- Within this the guiding principles and institutional arrangements for all key food system components, including the critical seed sector which determines the rest of the food system, agriculture production, and use of biotechnology and GE in agriculture, food and the environment, can be holistically set out. It must frame the imperatives of all further food system legislation and any amendments to take place (and therefore they should not be legislated now).

The Call for development and adoption of holistic food system governance structures is part of broader international processes to transform food systems. It is recommended at National, Regional economic communities (RECs) and continental levels through the adoption of a Common Food Policy in Africa, supported by the African Union, The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable food Systems, The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, and multiple partners and UN agencies FAO, CFS). This includes development of country level food policies, to systematically address Africa's collective transition to feeding itself healthy diverse food and food sovereignty

Conclusion and findings from the African Union report:

At the beginning of this briefing, we described the global food systems context and the need for food system coordination, in order to overcomes the multiple and intersected challenges the world, and Zambia faces. To do this, requires cohesive food systems governance through the adoption of comprehensive Food Policies - which acts as a transformative tool to a healthy, just and sustainable food system

The African Union study on inform the development of an African food policy, found current African food systems policy frameworks are incoherent because they are:

- Developed independently of each other,
- Are a mix of plans, programmes, strategies and polices that are not clearly defined in terms of authority, hierarchy and developmental process,
- often developed by external consultants with a poor understanding of the African contexts.

The main areas of food policy incoherence are in connection with provision for the right to food, farmers rights and climate resilience building.

Other findings included:

- African food governance structures and systems are largely non-transformational
- African food systems are unsustainable and not resilient to climate change and other shocks
- Africa food systems are culturally, socially and economically inappropriate
- A high proportion of African population is food insecure and malnourished.

It therefore recommended the Development of an African Food Policy to increase the coherence and give commons direction to African food related polices at all levels.

Contact

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