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RFS FOOD SYSTEMS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

JULY 2021

RFS Food Systems Conceptual Framework

DRIVERS				
Technology and infrastructure	Politics and governance	Institutions and social norms	Demography, geography, and migration	Climate, environment, and environmental sustainability
Globalization	Conflicts, shocks, and stressors	Finance and trade	Income growth and distribution	Public health system and disease

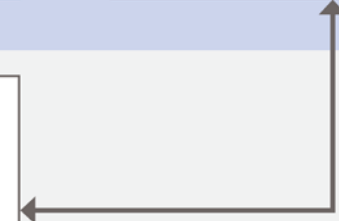
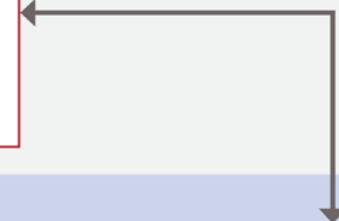
FOOD SYSTEM: SUPPLY AND DEMAND		
Food supply <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and water resources • Input and water supply • Agricultural production and loss • Transport and storage • Food trade and distribution • Processing and packaging 	Food environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange and prices • Availability and affordability • Markets and access • Promotion, advertising and information • Food and water quality and safety 	Food and water utilization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchasing power • Behavior and preferences • Intrahousehold dynamics and vulnerabilities • Preparation and waste • Hygiene behaviors

DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES	
Diets	Income, health, and nutrition
	Environmental sustainability

INVESTMENT LEVELS					
Research and technology development	Infrastructure, policy, and governance	Social protection and human capital	Risk mitigation and adaptation	Capacity, education, and behavior change	Information access and connectivity

Resilience

Resilience



OVERVIEW

The U.S. Global Food Security Strategy defines food systems as “the intact or whole unit made up of interrelated components of people, behaviors, relationships, and material goods that interact in the production, processing, packaging, transporting, trade, marketing, consumption, and use of food, feed, and fiber through aquaculture, farming, wild fisheries, forestry, and pastoralism. The food and agriculture system operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic, and environmental contexts.” The Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) Food Systems Conceptual Framework was designed to articulate the contribution of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to strengthening food systems and provide high-level operational guidance to RFS staff globally, in line with our overall strategy to build more resilient communities and sustainably reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

The framework illustrates how key elements of the agency’s work come together as part of the food system, specifically: agriculture-led economic growth, water, nutrition, and resilience. It was developed in consultation with staff from across RFS and included consultations with other USAID Bureaus and a team of external experts to ensure it is fully aligned with bureau priorities and represents the best of food systems thinking from across sectors and disciplines.

This framework is adapted from the food systems conceptual framework developed by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) in the 2017 report Nutrition and Food Systems. The RFS food systems conceptual framework features key components shown in the HLPE framework, including drivers (red), the food system (blue) and outcomes (brown).

Food System: Supply and Demand: Similar to the HLPE framework, the RFS framework can be read left to right, starting with Food System: Supply and Demand, which includes the components of food supply, food environment, and food and water utilization.

Development Outcomes: A bidirectional arrow links the food system to development outcomes, with diet; income; health and nutrition; and environmental sustainability as fundamental and interdependent higher-order outcomes.

Resilience: Depicted as a light blue box, resilience surrounds both the food system and the development outcomes, highlighting resilience as a characteristic of the outcomes and a condition that impacts (and is impacted by) activities that take place within the food system.

How conceptual frameworks (CFs) in general can and should be used:

CFs are two-dimensional maps of an infinitely complex, multidimensional world; they include only the few most important features of the landscape, selected to help guide particular kinds of action.

CFs aim to improve discussion among stakeholders; they should be used to facilitate communication and coordination about actors, actions and outcomes.

CFs show diverse elements in different categories placed relative to each other on the map, using text, colors and shapes to highlight similarities and differences.

CFs show relationships between categories in two dimensions, arrayed left to right, up and down or in concentric rings to show sequences and linkages.

Arrows suggest causal links. Causal models and theories of change hypothesize that only some linkages matter, but in general everything is connected so there should be bidirectional arrows linking all elements to every other element.

Drivers: At the top of the framework, drivers represent external forces that impact, and may be impacted by, the food system in both positive and negative ways.

Investment Levers: At the bottom of the framework, investment levers indicate options for action or influence.

RFS designed this food systems conceptual framework specifically to inform USAID programming. This framework not only depicts RFS' perspective on the food system and its role in sustainably reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, but it also illustrates the range of ways RFS might take action through food systems to achieve these outcomes, with diet as the most immediate outcome.

While actors are not explicitly called out in this depiction of the food system, they are implicit throughout the framework. For example, a range of actors contribute to the investment levers and have a joint impact on the food system. Similarly, the framework invites users to consider the variable participation and physical, financial, cultural and social access by men, women, youth and children within and across the drivers, as well as the supply and demand components of the food system.

The framework is designed to facilitate mapping of RFS equities across resilience, nutrition, water, and agriculture-led economic growth – and how they interact with one another and the broader food system. The framework can be used to guide programmatic decisions, reduce technical silos, enhance synergies, and help USAID staff conceptualize how they are moving together towards common goals.

DIFFERENTIATING FACTORS OF THIS FRAMEWORK

There are three significant factors that distinguish this conceptual framework from other food systems frameworks, orienting it more precisely toward RFS' unique perspective, interests, and priorities. The three – resilience, investment levers, and water are described in detail below.

RESILIENCE

In the process of developing the RFS conceptual framework, we looked critically at the parts of our work missing from other frameworks – both food systems frameworks and other guiding frameworks. Across these sources, we found inadequate attention to the risk of exposure to shocks and stressors. With resilience as a critical issue in the countries where we work, it required explicit representation in our depiction of the food system. USAID defines resilience as the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems (social, economic, ecological) to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.

The RFS framework links the core food system activities (food supply, food environment, and food and water utilization) to resilience, as well as the development outcomes. This suggests the integrated role of resilience across activities and processes happening simultaneously within the food system. Resilience should not be thought of as a separate sector, rather as an underlying factor affected by and affecting parts of the food system and, in turn, influencing food system actors, actions and processes in both positive and negative ways.

INVESTMENT LEVERS

Another differentiating feature is the inclusion of investment levers in the framework. These levers represent specific investments that affect both the food system and development outcomes, which is missing from many prominent food systems frameworks. These levers describe prevailing categories of action that USAID, public and private sector actors can use to strengthen the food system to accelerate and/or protect progress. The investment levers include research and technology; infrastructure, policy,

and governance; social protection and human capital; risk mitigation and adaptation; capacity, education and behavior change; and information access and connectivity. These intervention areas can also be considered through cross-cutting lenses like gender equality and women's empowerment to interrogate theories of change as part of program design, assessment, implementation and measurement.

WATER

Under the new Center for Water Security, Sanitation and Hygiene, water is a formal focus area for RFS, with the Center's goal "to increase the availability and sustainable management of safe water and sanitation for the underserved and most vulnerable." RFS' focus on water reaches beyond water as a natural resource; water is critical for food production and sanitation (including hygiene behaviors) at the household level. The conceptual framework depicts how water is relevant in multiple aspects across the food system: from an important agricultural input through to improved water for drinking, sanitation and use by households.

USING THIS FRAMEWORK

A food system reflects a complex, interwoven set of elements that function synergistically. In creating this framework, strategic decisions were made in an effort to describe a complex system in a simple, clear and usable way. To achieve sustained development across the food system, the focus must be on the system as a whole: the actors, their interrelationships and the incentives that guide them. This food systems conceptual framework does not perfectly represent all aspects of a food system; rather it prioritizes the relationships and interactions that are essential to RFS' specific goals and manageable interests.

While it is a challenge to show how the concept of resilience applies across the framework, its representation exists to prompt users to consider how drivers (such as external shocks), investment levers (risk reduction and mitigation), and activity within the food system might influence or be influenced by resilience in positive and negative ways. The stability and volatility of a food system are always changing and though a framework can provide a lens through which to look at the actors and actions in the system, stability and volatility are important to consider when viewing the food systems as a whole.

Considering vulnerability, marginalization, gender equality and women's empowerment across the drivers and investment levers is important to the success of RFS's work. Women and youth are often under-represented in policy considerations, and have more limited access to technology, financing, employment and productive assets. They often have different roles and responsibilities, and are affected differently by shocks and stresses. Household dynamics and decisions about livelihoods, what they grow, what they sell and how they spend their money has a direct effect not just on family diets, but also on income, health, and nutrition outcomes.

Lastly, this framework focuses on whole countries and regions, to show change at national scale as the sum of all individual and household changes. As such, RFS staff can use it to identify opportunities for action, collaboration, and highlight linkages to other systems. Additionally, this framework serves as a foundation on which more detailed results frameworks may be developed as part of programming to build resilient communities and countries, with reduced hunger, poverty and malnutrition.