







## 8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very clear that donors and partner governments are operating in a substantially different environment from that in the early era of the aid effectiveness agenda. The world today is dealing with multiple and overlapping crises that are making coordination more challenging. The impacts of these crises are also being felt most acutely in low-income and developing countries. There is a clear need for a renewed focus on building resilience and capacity to cope with these shocks.

Among partner government representatives, donors, international organizations and NGOs, there is also clear recognition that coordination between all development partners could be substantially improved, with considerable benefits for the impacts of development investments. Those interviewed offered numerous practical examples of how poor coordination can undermine development efforts. The complexity of the current environment creates new challenges for coordination, but it also presents opportunities. Donors and partner governments must consider and contend with not just the politics but also the political economy of coordination for food systems and identify the appropriate dialogue and negotiation mechanisms to work through issues on the ground. This requires structural changes in the way donors and partner governments think about policies, reforms and institutions.

The current situation also presents an opportunity to do things differently and to innovate in terms of approaches for coordination and collaboration. There is a growing set of examples at the country level and across global programmes that illustrate good practices for coordination. Monitoring and evaluation, and a framework for tracking

investments, and their effectiveness and impact, are also critical in building the case for investments in food systems transformation. Together, these constitute a set of key considerations for how donors and development partners can more effectively coordinate their support for the food systems agenda at the country level.<sup>18</sup> Critically, it should be recognized that improving coordination is not simply a technical issue; rather, it is highly political, with inevitable areas of tension, conflict and legitimate differences in objectives between different development partners. Ultimately, coordination will only be improved if these political interests and differences are understood and mechanisms are put in place to enable effective negotiation and the resolution of differences. The outcomes of the workstream on donor coordination, drawing on the interviews, a seminar and literature, have led to the following eight areas of recommendations.

**1 National food systems transformation pathways must be developed as a key framework for aligning donor investments with national priorities for food systems transformation.** The food systems agenda calls for a deeply integrated approach across sectors and ministries. Most countries have now developed national food systems transformation pathways, which, although heterogeneous in structure and quality, bring together national priorities from national development and sector plans related to food systems. In most cases, these pathways also draw on the outcomes of national food systems dialogues. These pathways are a first attempt by countries to articulate an integrated agenda for food systems transformation. To be effective, they will need to be refined and strengthened over time, even as more attention is focused on the structural constraints to food systems transformation.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 1

- **Recognize national food systems transformation pathways as a key mechanism for aligning food systems-related investments with national priorities.**
- **Support partner governments to continuously monitor and update the pathways as “living documents”.**
- **Encourage and support ongoing multi-stakeholder national dialogue processes linked with implementing, reviewing and updating national pathways.**

**2 Donors should proactively support enhanced collaborative planning at the national level.** This review has established that there is widespread support for a more structured approach to donors collaboratively planning their country investments to optimize their alignment and synergies.

<sup>18</sup> The conclusions and recommendations for this report were discussed at the high-level dialogue “Donor Coordination for Food Systems Transformation: A forward agenda”, held in Rome, Italy, on 27 June 2023. The hybrid (online and in-person) event was attended by over 70 people, and high-level participation in the event included a minister and senior representatives of international organizations and donor countries. The invitation-only event was held under the Chatham House rule.

This requires donors to go beyond a “show and tell” approach, in which they simply share their activities with each other, to designing their interventions in relation to an entire package of donor support that responds to partner government priorities. Furthermore, donors and development partners need to be more proactive in building alliances and partnerships for food systems transformation with other stakeholders that are engaged in the food systems ecosystem. Support for collaborative planning would require the development of a framework structuring for how donors and partner governments would work together. The potential benefits of a collaborative planning approach would have spillover benefits to development efforts across other sectors as well.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 2

- **Acknowledge the value of a more structured approach to collaborative planning at the national level.**
- **Utilize national food systems transformation pathways as a basis for collaborative planning.**
- **Work with partner governments to ensure that donor investments support the “soft” investments needed in stakeholder dialogue, to improve systems change capabilities and for policy reform to transform food systems.**
- **Consider options for impartial convening of collaborative planning processes that enable all development partners (including the private sector) to come to a neutral table.**
- **Work towards building alliances and partnerships with key actors and stakeholders engaged in the food systems ecosystem.**

**3 Individual donors should develop coordination policies and principles to achieve food systems transformation.** Donors can reconsider and reassess the extent of their compliance with the aid effectiveness agenda. They can complement this with their own specific policies on coordination. Such policies could address how they would engage in collaborative programming at the national level, their internal positions on working across sectors to achieve food systems transformation and their position on supporting different financing modalities. Donors can consider ways in which enhanced coordination and collaboration can be incentivized institutionally and through policy frameworks.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 3

- **Donors should develop their own internal guiding principles and policies on country-level coordination around food systems that specifically address how to engage in collaborative programming for food systems transformation at the country level. In particular, donors should consider how to create stronger institutional incentives for effective coordination.**

## **4 Donors should review options for more effective information systems to support coordination at the national and global levels.**

Gathering data and evidence to improve coordination is critical.

Development partners in several countries have begun mapping donor investments in food systems as a basis for improving coordination.

However, such information-gathering is not currently widespread across countries or at the global level.

### RECOMMENDATION AREA 4

- **In consultation with partner governments, donors should draw on lessons learned from mapping donor investments at the country level to explore options for a common framework and data infrastructure that could be used in a flexible way across multiple countries. If there is sufficient support, donors should invest in supporting the development of the necessary data infrastructure.**

**5 Donors should review modalities of funding food systems and rural development.** Funding for food systems is delivered through a wide range of modalities, including bilateral budget support, concessional and non-concessional loans, joint trust funds, programmes of United Nations agencies and CGIAR, and support for international NGOs and other civil society organizations and joint initiatives such as GAFSP or the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. In taking a forward-looking perspective on how best to support food systems transformation in the long term, in what is likely to be an increasingly turbulent and crisis-driven context, there is a clear need for a more comprehensive assessment of the advantages and constraints of different funding modalities, their impact and value for money, and how best to balance resources across them.

### RECOMMENDATION AREA 5

- **Donors should instigate a collective review of funding modalities for food systems transformation and rural development with a view to creating a shared guiding framework for optimizing the complementarity of differing funding streams.**

**6 Donors should increase the amount of coordinated funding available for initiatives that support the underlying processes of structural change in food systems.** Food systems transformation is a complex and multifaceted process that requires structural changes at multiple points within an ecosystem of institutions, structures and actors that are engaged within it. The current pressures and constraints on donors and development partners have resulted in donors having a tendency to focus on discrete areas within the food

systems architecture, for example nutrition or food security. While these efforts are necessary, they cannot substitute for broader systemic investments by donors in the institutions, policies and practices that are instrumental in enabling a whole-system transformation. In this regard, the role of donor investments in multilateral programmes needs specific consideration. As articulated in numerous dialogues and documents associated with the UNFSS, food systems transformation will require long-term attention to the underlying political economy factors that enable or restrict change, and the power relations that influence these factors in turn. Donors, development partners and partner governments also need to acknowledge that there will be incompatibilities between donor and country priorities and that space and time for negotiation will be required. Donors and governments have their own political priorities, and an honest conversation about what is feasible in terms of country-level coordination should take place.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 6

- **In consultation with partner governments and other actors at the national and local levels, donors should explore the types of support needed to drive longer-term structural change to achieve desired food systems outcomes. This requires an enhanced theory of change analysis for country investment strategies, focusing on the “how” of food systems transformation. Furthermore, at the country level, donors and governments must recognize the importance and value of an articulated negotiation process around food systems transformation.**

**7 Donors should review options for enhanced coordination forums/mechanisms at the global level.** There is a complexity of institutional arrangements at the global level for food security and food systems, including the CFS, G7 and G20. Despite the presence of these platforms and processes, some donors and other actors consider that donors lack a regular process for holding in-depth discussions on coordination issues, which could enable more aligned engagement across a range of global governance mechanisms. Such coordination would ultimately lead to better coordination at the country and subnational levels. This is particularly the case in relation to responding to crisis issues, where new crises tend to spur yet another initiative. While the GDPRD provides a platform for donors to engage, network and learn, to date it has not provided a more structural approach to coordinating donor responses to emerging issues or upcoming global forums. The UNFSS 2023 stocktaking process presents another opportunity for donors and development partners to consider how the momentum around global events such as the UNFSS and similar marquee events can be sustained on a more regular basis. It also provides an opportunity to consider how the GDPRD or other platforms can bring together donors and development partners in a more structured way, to coordinate specific areas within the food systems architecture. Structured



discussions and meetings can usefully serve as preparatory mechanisms and inputs to intergovernmental processes, including the G7 and the G20, and COP meetings.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 7

- **Donors should examine whether existing global mechanisms enable sufficient donor coordination and alignment and, if not, look at how this could be strengthened in the context of existing institutional arrangements.**

### **8 Donors should establish review mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of donor coordination and brainstorm approaches for tracking and measuring food systems transformation at the country level.**

The need for greater monitoring and evaluation of donor coordination efforts around food systems repeatedly emerged in interviews as a key area requiring greater focus from donors and development partners alike. While individual project- or programme-level evaluations have been conducted, there appears to be very limited research on what approaches to or practices for donor coordination are most effective at the country level, especially around food systems. There are also clear examples and pilot studies in various countries where donors, partner governments and other stakeholders are coming together to address the issues of coordination around food systems, food security and nutrition, and other allied areas, such as health, water and sanitation. Therefore, there is scope for more effective sharing of experiences, best practices and lessons learned between and among donors and partner governments. Finally, while acknowledging that tracking systemic change is challenging, there is a clear need to think about how donors, development partners, partner governments and other stakeholders can use existing data, indicators and other metrics to track and measure food systems transformation.

## RECOMMENDATION AREA 8

- **Collectively support the monitoring and evaluation of coordination at the national level on food systems, agriculture and rural development.**
- **Undertake meta-evaluations of country-level evaluations of the effectiveness of coordination.**
- **Collectively support efforts to document and share lessons learned and best practices from ongoing coordination efforts at the country level in the area of food systems and in other allied areas, such as health, water and sanitation.**
- **Brainstorm approaches and methods for tracking and measuring systemic change in food systems at the country level.**

