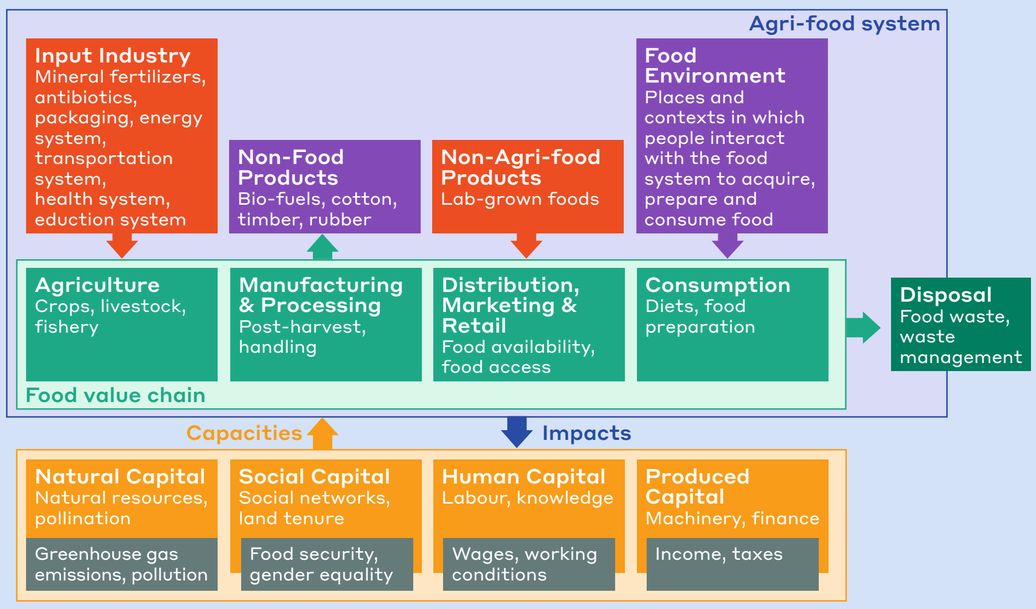
Food Systems – True Cost Accounting

FORESEE (4C) Report Series

The Transformation of Agri-food Systems in Times of Multiple Crises

Conceptual framing of agri-food systems – the different constituents of agri-food systems and their interactions



Challenging conditions

In times of multiple crises - referred to as the 4 Cs (climate, post-COVID, conflict, and costs) - agri-food systems face unprecedented challenges. These shocks expose vulnerabilities, threatening global food security, livelihoods, and biodiversity. Agri-food systems both contribute and are affected by the polycrisis. Urgent transformation is needed to build resilient systems that reduce dependency, mitigate climate impact, and align with agreed international goals such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the three Rio Conventions.

Agri-food systems are among the drivers of the 4Cs

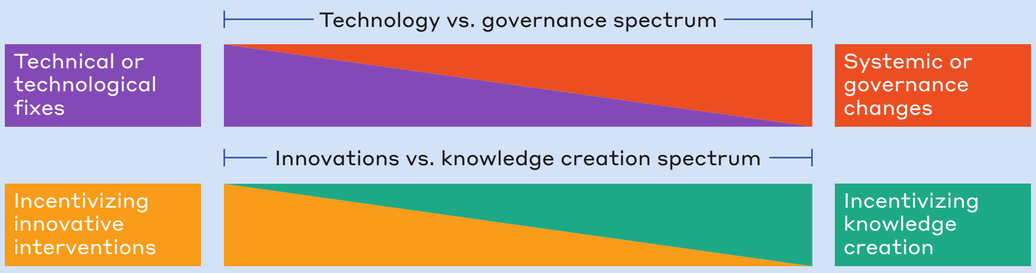
The negative impacts of current agri-food systems are further driving the crises of the 4Cs – climate, Covid-19, conflict and the cost of externalities. Responding to the 4Cs necessitates transforming agri-food systems.

4Cs		Agri-food systems
	Harvest losses, breakdown of supply chains and food shortage	
Climate	Current agri-food systems are responsible for one third of total anthopogenic greenhouse gas emissions	Agriculture
Conflict	Disruptions in agri-food systems and food suplly chains can spur territorial conflicts and worsen existing ones	Manufacturing & processing
Covid-19	Land use change leads to destruction of wildlife habitats and increases risk of infectious disease (zoonosis)	Distribution, marketing & retail
Cost of externalities	Dominant practices in agri-food systems levy huge externalized costs through pollution, biodiversity loss and soil degradation	Consumption

Approaches and blind spots in the debate

The debate on food systems transformation brings together diverse actors, from civil society to corporations and governments. While all agree that incremental changes are insufficient, pathways differ: some advocate for structural changes, others for technical solutions. Approaches broadly align with goals for people, planet, and prosperity, yet challenges remain, including governance issues, polarized views, and externalized costs.

The transformation pathways proposed by different organisations are spread over a wide spectrum of approaches



Critical gaps and blindspots in the international agri-food systems transformation debate

Identified gaps & blindspots	Relevance to agri-food systems transformation
1 Governance	Empowering people and communities to engage with **decisionmaking** in agri-food systems
2 Corporate interests	Resolving the **power imbalances**, particularly, in view of the multistakeholder approach
3 Polarization	Addressing polarization by bringing **everyone** to the table
4 Human rights-based approach	Approaching agri-food transformation from a **human rights** perspective
5 Resilience	Building resilience in the agri-food systems to **avoid breakdowns** in the face of crises and shocks
6 Indigenous & traditional systems	Acknowledging the role of **indigenous and traditional systems** in the transformation
7 Accounting for externalities	**True Cost Accounting** (TCA) of the externalities of the agri-food systems
8 Trade dynamics	Modifying **trade regulations** to acknowledge food as more than a trade commodity

Guiding the transformation

Successful transformation of agri-food systems requires a robust governance framework and practical guidance. TMG's proposed multi-level governance system, aligned with global goals, and a step-by-step transformation protocol provide a roadmap. This framework emphasizes participatory, transparent pathways, continuous adaptation, and rigorous monitoring, and provides essential tools to address barriers and promote inclusive, resilient food system transformation. Adapting a human rights approach is key.

Multi-level Governance Framework

	Decision level	Institutional level	Activities
What	International level	Rio Conventions: UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD	Monitor, report, validate
What	National level	National food system transformation pathways	National policies & strategies
How and Who	Operational level	Transformational protocol	Solution & implementation

A rights-based approach is key!

The Agri-food Systems Transformation Protocol with its four stages and nine steps

Step 1: Triggers & Needs
Identifying the triggers and needs for transformation

Step 2: System Analysis
Analyzing the system and uncovering the barriers

Step 3: Ideation
Idea inception

Step 4: Actors & Partnerships
Actor mapping and forming partnerships

Step 5: Scenario analysis
Scenario analysis and setting standards

Step 6: Advocacy & Politics
Advocating and leveraging political will

Step 7: Action
Implementation

Step 8: Reassessment
Monitoring and assessment

Step 9: Adaptation
Analysis and adaptation

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