



INSTITUTE FOR POVERTY, LAND AND
AGRARIAN STUDIES (PLAAS)

Labour & Enterprise Policy
Research Group



WORKING
Paper **39**

Understanding South African food and agricultural policy

Implications for agri-food value chains,
regulation, and formal and informal livelihoods

16 August 2016

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PLAAS Working Paper 37: Understanding South African food and agricultural policy: Implications for agri-food value chains, regulation, and formal and informal livelihoods

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Partners: *The project is supported by:*

*The DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, hosted by UWC and co-hosted by the University of Pretoria
The African Centre for Cities and Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group, University of Cape Town*

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Layout: Rebecca Pointer

Cite as: Drimie, S. 2016. Understanding South African food and agricultural policy: Implications for agri-food value chains, regulation, and formal and informal livelihoods, *Working Paper 39*. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence on Food Security.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges important reviews by Dr Gareth Haysom and Prof Andries Du Toit in terms of content, structure and argument. A conversation with Caroline Skinner, Etai Even-Zahav and Gareth Haysom around the main argument gave the paper impetus. Rebecca Pointer provided significant suggestions for improving language and flow. The paper was enabled through research funding provided by the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security. The author takes full responsibility for any errors or shortcomings.

ABSTRACT

In order to create credibility and sustainability between policies, to avoid political confusion and to reassure “investor confidence”, a clear agri-food policy package needs to be in place. To achieve this, policy packages should be constructed to give coherence, with an explicit goal and set of objectives, underscoring accountability to delivery. Considering current policy debates, the questions pursued in this paper are: does a clear vision guide existing and emerging agriculture and food policies and are a clear set of measures defined to achieve this vision? By analysing several relevant policies, the paper argues that South African food and agricultural policy profoundly lacks coherence. Although policy may seem to be aligned at one level, the reality of implementation and the political rhetoric emerging around food and agriculture tells a different story. This lack of coherence has important implications for a food system that is faltering in many respects, and for research or processes intended to inform evidence-based policy.

Keywords: South Africa, agricultural policy, food policy, livelihoods

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ACRONYMS

APAP	Agricultural Policy Action Plan
BFAP	Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DED	Department of Economic Development
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DoH	Department of Health
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
IGDP	Integrated Growth and Development Policy
IPAP	Industrial Policy Action Plan
MTSF	Medium Term Strategic Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NGP	New Growth Path
NPC	National Planning Commission

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Presidency is mandated in the South African government to coordinate and integrate government policies. It is meant to act as a mediator of conflict between the different sectors or departments, reconcile differences and act as a think tank to give coherence to government structure and function. Coordinating and integrating policies is no small task as government structures often create inconsistent policies through the narrow lens of separate political mandates. This narrow lens is reinforced by government architecture where separate departments need to address particular issues; a lack of clear hierarchy between departments may also create inconsistencies.

These challenges are not uncommon across governments globally, underscoring the need for an arbiter such as the Presidency to provide coherence and direction. In particular, coherence means that government policies will not undermine each other as they are translated into action and activities. Therefore, a clearly articulated goal or purpose, when held strongly by an arbiter such as the Presidency, will help align various sectoral policies to compliment and reinforce each other to meet an overarching intention.

The Presidency thus has a clear mandate: in order to create credibility and sustainability between policies, to avoid political confusion and to reassure “investor confidence”, a clear policy package should be in place. Certainty arises if constituencies or investors are confident that a policy will not change direction in the middle of a programme and that it is part of a broader political agenda that will garner support and emphasis. To achieve this, policy packages should be constructed to give coherence, with an explicit goal and set of objectives, underscoring accountability to delivery. Coherent policy packages should be supported by appropriate rhetoric, emphasising the explicit goal and objectives. The clearer and more tangible policy packages are, the less uncertainty will arise.

The argument put forward here is that in the context of food and agriculture policy in South Africa, there is a profound lack of coherence, with important implications for a food system that is faltering in many respects. Although policy may seem to be aligned at one level, the reality of implementation and the political rhetoric emerging around food and agricultural policy tells a different story. The lack of coherence has important implications for the formal and informal dimensions of the food system, and for research or processes intended to inform evidence-based policy.

2. THE CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is instructive to consider current policy debates around food and agriculture and to be aware of the complex inter-sectoral response and coordination required. A key question is whether existing and emerging agriculture and food policies are guided by a clear vision and whether a clear set of measures are defined to achieve this vision? The right to food is a constitutional right within South Africa, as established in Section 27.1.b and 28.1.b (RSA 1996). The Constitution (1996) requires that ‘the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realization of this right’.

Various policies around agriculture have, since 1994, had three main focus areas in common: (1) improving the competitiveness of commercial agriculture in a free market dispensation, (2) improving participation by disadvantaged communities, and (3) protecting the natural resource base. Food policy has been far less clear although arguably more focused on securing food availability in South Africa, with poor articulation with how food is accessed, consumed and integrated in a broader food system.

The National Development Plan (NDP) of 2012 has become the overarching government development agenda (NPC 2012) although not all sectors of government necessarily adhere to its vision. The NDP identifies agriculture as primarily an economic activity in rural areas with the potential to create one million new jobs by 2030. The plan proposes several approaches to land reform and its financing. As such, the NDP suggests a wider set of engagements and better integration between departments to ensure food and nutrition security.

The NDP clearly states that ensuring quality access to basic services, health care, education and food security are key issues for building an integrated and inclusive rural economy (NPC 2012). The central analysis of the NDP regarding food is that the ability to access food determines household food security. This central analysis implies that job creation, agricultural productivity, and providing aid to poor households to cope with increases in food prices are important. In terms of safety nets, access to social grants for eligible households should be maintained and public works programmes utilised and expanded to develop rural infrastructure.

An important feature of the engagement with food and nutrition security is the link between food security to the wider food system. The NDP calls for greater investment in (1) the agricultural and agro-processing sectors; (2) areas of small, medium and micro-enterprise growth to create jobs and redress skewed ownership patterns; and (3) fruit and vegetable production in order to better align the sector to nutritional intake guidelines. This call markedly diverges from generally received agricultural development plans that focus on grain and crops for export (NPC 2012).

The NDP also situates the South African food system in the broader southern African context. The plan states that South Africa should aim to 'maintain a positive trade balance for primary and processed agricultural products, and not to achieve food self-sufficiency in staple foods at all costs' (NPC 2012: 230). Regional cooperation and regional expansion of production were thus highlighted as central.

The potential for a million new jobs in agriculture deserves more scrutiny, as it is core to the envisaged rural economy. The Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy (BFAP), commissioned by the NPC, assumed that policy frameworks, including labour legislation, fiscal allocation to develop infrastructure, and all other government support for the country's growth would be in place by 2030 (Phillips 2012). BFAP (2011) then identified five ways to improve agricultural employment:

1. Expand irrigation agriculture: currently 1,5 million hectares are under irrigation, producing nearly all of the horticultural harvest, and over a third of the country's land crops.
2. Commercialise communal land: underused land in communal areas and land reform projects should be brought into commercial production, keeping in mind land reform objectives and the country's food security needs.
3. Choosing top crops: commercial sectors and regions that have the highest potential for growth, specifically growth that helps to create employment, need support.
4. Create employment in the value chain: jobs have to be created in agricultural industries both 'upstream' and 'downstream'. For this to work, the above three strategies need to be successful, increasing output growth.
5. Using creative combinations of the above opportunities: including greater emphasis on:
 - a. land that has the potential for - or that has already been serviced with - irrigation infrastructure;
 - b. targeting successful farmers in the communal areas as land reform beneficiaries; and
 - c. supporting industries and areas of high job creation potential.

The NDP also suggested channeling a portion of social grants through special school feeding schemes that could, in addition to boosting nutrition, stimulate local economies by financing food production by community members in the areas surrounding schools. The school feeding programme was seen as a way creating an enabling environment for agriculture so as to contribute to economic growth and job creation.

The New Growth Path (NGP) (EDD 2013) is South Africa's vision to place jobs and decent work at the centre of economic policy. Drafted by the Economic Development Department (2013), the NGP sets out to implement macroeconomic and microeconomic interventions with clear and concrete stakeholder commitments to move the country into faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth. The plan complements the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) (EDD 2011).

The NGP takes job creation as the top priority, setting a target of five million additional jobs by 2020, and laying out the key employment drivers and priority sectors on which the country will focus over the medium term. As such, the NGP lists concrete actions to drive a more labour-absorbing growth pattern in targeted sectors: infrastructure, agricultural value chains, mining value chains, the green economy, manufacturing sectors, tourism, and other high-level services.

The NGP set targets to increase the smallholder sector by 300 000 households, ensure 145 000 additional jobs in agro-processing, and improved working conditions for 660 000 farm workers. Similarly, the NDP highlights the role of smallholder farmers in realising a food trade surplus, with potentially one third produced by smallholders. The above policy directives reflect the importance of subsistence and smallholder agriculture for agrarian development (Hendriks 2014), especially black farming households (Aliber&Hall 2012).

These "policy promises" are reflected in the 2014 budget review, which shows that R7 billion would be allocated to developing subsistence and smallholder farmers over three years (National Treasury 2015). Similarly, both the NDP AND NGP are supported by the first cycle of the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF 2014–2019) (DPME 2014) for the rural sector. The MTSF (DPME 2014) focuses on achieving fourteen outcomes generated from both policy frameworks, three of which specifically relate to agriculture, as follows:

- Outcome 4: decent employment through inclusive growth;
- Outcome 7: comprehensive rural development and food security; and
- Outcome 10: protect and enhance our environmental assets and natural resources.

Establishing food security in the national development agenda has, in turn, influenced transversal and departmental programmes to mitigate food and nutrition insecurity. Notable strategies and programmes include:

- The Roadmap for Nutrition in South Africa (2013–2017) (DOH 2013).
- Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) programmes such as:
 - the Integrated Growth and Development Policy for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (IGDP) (2012); and
 - the Agricultural Policy Action Plan (APAP) (2013).

In particular the IGDP and APAP seek to facilitate equitable growth and employment in the agricultural sector, in line with the NDP. These plans speak to the sustainable use of agricultural natural resources, enhanced food security, and improved governance. The broader frameworks are supported by a plethora of other key national agreements, plans and strategies cascading from other sectors including the Departments of Health, Social Development, and Education.

A new National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (DAFF 2014) gained momentum through 2014 when it was gazetted with very little fanfare, and into 2015 when an implementation plan

began to form. Stated policy goals include increasing food production and distribution, and supporting community-based and smallholder production (ibid). Five pillars underpin the policy strategies (ibid), including:

1. A need for state, private and non-governmental actors to improve nutritional safety nets by:
 - a. Better nutritional education;
 - b. Increased agricultural investment, particularly in rural areas, to improve the efficiency of food storage and distribution networks, and access to inputs;
 - c. Better market emerging farmer participation through public-private partnerships; and
 - d. Food security risk management.

The policy briefly touches on food security measures, the impact of climate change and the creation of a centralised food security control system.

Taking cognisance of Food and Nutrition Policy and the powerful influences of the NDP and NGP, it becomes clear that South Africa's official approach to food security focuses on developing rural livelihoods, as government does not address urban food insecurity. Policies assume that a food security programme 'that promotes and supports smallholder production is a potent anti-poverty strategy' (Marais 2011). However, when the strategy does not acknowledge urban food insecurity, in a rapidly urbanising context, it becomes a significant oversight.

Although it is too early to assess the Food and Nutrition Policy, its development has been characterised by a lack of consultation and co-development of what was required and how this would be delivered. Nonetheless a generous analysis can argue that an enforceable and comprehensive food security policy and implementation plan can now guide the establishment of a comprehensive national food security strategy to progressively achieve the targets set out in the preceding frameworks and help realise the right to food enshrined in the constitution.

Standing back from the above policy frameworks, arguably, at one level, there seems to be coherence among policies. However, the reality of translating these policies into programmes and activities, and the measures required to achieve their objectives, belies a story of a common goal. Currently, there is significant discord amongst policies.

The current South African system fails to deliver the three crucial outcomes of a well-functioning food system: food security, social welfare and environmental welfare (Ericksen 2008). Various other factors, outside the food system, influence the three outcomes, but coherent policy is a key factor. Revealing and addressing the structural underpinnings of the agrarian system would be one factor. Below, examples of policy discord are explored.

3. EMERGING DISCORD

Under the Presidency, the MTSF identifies several outcomes to operationalise the Strategic Framework. The outcomes were strongly influenced by the key policymaking institution in South Africa – the policy conference of the governing political party, the African National Congress, which takes place every five years. The conference resolutions shape the government 'programme of work' and the parliamentary legislative programme. Based on the MTSF, twelve national Outcomes were developed, with food security an explicit objective under Outcome 7: 'Vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural communities with food security for all', coordinated by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR, 2011).

The Delivery Agreement between participating departments clearly acknowledges the centrality of budgeting, planning and implementing various programmes that cut across

different departments and the three spheres of government. The agreement also recognises that other sector policies that support food security should be reviewed, considering current challenges and new programmes and ensuring coordinated programme implementation. The Delivery Agreement includes programmes such as the school nutrition programme, comprehensive social security, and free basic services (DRDLR 2011). In developing the Delivery Agreement, DRDLR explicitly acknowledged that for these programmes to have maximum impact on food insecurity, they would have to be audited, aligned and integrated.

However, moving towards actual alignment has been challenging for DRDLR, since they have no mandate to compel other departments to comply – apart from the shared Outcome. Discussions about targets and definitions reveal that different departments have divergent concepts about what smallholder farmers and community gardens are and how to measure them (Drimie et al. 2012). Although the Presidency has developed suitable indicators, closely consulting with departments, interpretations and reporting against them has not been uniform. Many of these discussions also emphasise a production approach to food insecurity, despite the language of accessibility.

In terms of the agricultural sector and relevant policies, contradictions emerge in the focus on smallholder farming. Despite continued production growth and some value generated in the sector, agricultural policy has failed to stem and reverse the job shedding – a key characteristic of the current agrarian system. APAP argues for finding a better balance between large-scale and smallholder subsectors in order to broaden market participation and thereby increase labour absorption. Several sub-strategies are put forward, including: promoting local food economies to create market efficiencies, lowering food prices, and stimulating local production and investment in agricultural value chains and logistics.

However, in spite of rhetorical commitment to smallholder agriculture in policy documents such as the NDP and NGP, available evidence suggests that actual policies favour medium- or large-scale emerging black commercial farmers. Land reform policy has more or less abandoned any coherent focus on pro-poor land redistribution (du Toit 2015).

Agricultural policy has also been unable to deal with widespread land degradation associated with the dominant, conventional large-scale cultivation approach (du Preez et al. 2011, Le Roux et al. 2007, Mills&Fey 2003). Chapter 6 of the NDP, although not explicit, is mainly geared towards large-scale irrigation farming, fuel-based mechanisation, mono-cropping, and export-oriented and agro-chemical-driven conventional agriculture. The NDP does not respond clearly to how conventional agricultural model exact a heavy environmental toll. Widespread land degradation in South Africa places a question mark over the ability of the conventional model to achieve increased production and job creation – either on currently farmed or underutilised land, as highlighted in the NDP.

Similarly, APAP calls for the pursuit of climate-smart practices and conservation agriculture, but still operates with the dominant, conventional paradigm. APAP instead emphasises changing control over the system rather than changing the system itself. The NGP and NDP encourage innovation to respond to climate change and risks associated with the environment. Yet, in key instances, output has been retained by discarding rotation, bringing poorer land under cultivation, and irrigating far more (Metelerkamp 2011).

Although APAP (DAFF 2013) holds real promise for shifting to a more equitable and efficient food system (with, potentially, more sustainable technologies driving smallholder farmer support) it makes several assumptions, echoed in the NDP. The plan stops short of prescribing a transformative system-wide and sector-wide move away from conventional and towards sustainable agriculture, thus running the risk of ‘tinkering on the margins’ in the search for sustainability. Contradictions exist, even within the NDP. One chapter espouses reducing carbon emissions, but another chapter invites infrastructure development in support of the coal industry. The

broad range of agriculture- and food-related policies also do not align coherently – partly because a clear vision of a future agrarian system and how to get there is missing. A recent policy review supports the argument about the lack of coherence, and found that South African agricultural policies do not actively promote food security, it difficult to coordinate existing policies (Hendriks&Olivier 2015).

Another example emanates from the nutrition policy. The *Roadmap for Nutrition in South Africa, 2013–2017* (DoH 2013) explicitly states that existing routine government operations will not successfully and effectively address malnutrition through sector-specific actions. The roadmap rather identifies the need for high level political will and sustained commitment to a multisectoral approach, involving several government departments at different levels, with private and civil society partnerships being key (DoH 2013). In terms of how to achieve these goals, the roadmap falls back on statements of intent and broad advocacy about the need to provide strategic inputs into agriculture, rural development, and social development (ibid). The recommendations therefore remain abstract, without clear direction, and with little to show for them. A Treasury review (2015) showed that many non-Health sector programmes that focused on nutrition-related issues had very little to show for nutrition-sensitive work.

Arguably then, despite superficial alignment and a focus on transformation, existing agriculture and food policies have failed to address the structural underpinnings of the agrarian system. Food policies fail to appreciate the rapid transformations in the processing and retail environments. Consolidation, contract buying and imports have changed the pre-1994 system in radical ways, which are not reflected coherently in policy analysis or prescription. These failures hint at a bias not only towards the middle to large farmer, but also ignorance about the nature of the system, embedded within the rhetoric.

Contradictions also play out in other ways, such as how the rural view of the food system jars with the reality of an urban food retail system, even in rural areas (Haysom 2015). The jarring rural view means that the formal, established and business-type view is transferred to the imagination of food retail. In this contradiction, two things transpire:

1. The rural bias results in obstructing the urban (in a country now over 60% urbanised).
2. The formal imagination disregards and even criminalises the informal sector. So, not only is there a lack of coherence within food and agricultural policy, there is also a poor understanding of how the food system functions beyond production (Haysom 2015).

In conclusion, an acute lack of coherence is evident in food and agricultural policy.

4. BROADER REFLECTIONS

Several key national goals, such as economic growth, job creation, food and nutritional security, and rural development are articulated in a range of national policies. The goals can, as we have seen, work against each other if not carefully aligned with a coherent vision. Simply put, South African politics centres on policy incoherence. The incoherence largely derives from government and Cabinet's ideological heterodoxy (Calland 2015). Essentially, policy coherence requires a more coordinated approach including political will and resourcing.

Therefore, it is important to explore the reasons for this lack of alignment. Du Toit (2015) argues that the current messy and chaotic outcome results from a complex set of interlocking factors, which together produce a crisis for land reform, rural development, and agricultural policy. This crisis can be defined as a 'wicked problem' because it is difficult to define precisely and has multiple causes (Rittel and Webber, 1973). A 'wicked problem' is socially complex because there are many players required to address it and many perspectives about how to do

so. It is dynamically complex because people have difficulty grasping the consequences of not dealing with it as the causes and effects are often intangible in space or time. It is also generatively complex, as its causes and consequences are unfolding in unfamiliar and unpredictable ways. Like all ‘wicked problems’¹, its permutations and ramifications are complex and often obscure – but some of the key underlying factors can clearly be spelled out.

Part of the story is that a “fluid policy hierarchy” exists, which requires careful analysis and understanding. The existing “policy hierarchy” implies that some policies enjoy greater high-level attention and resourcing, at particular moments, related to particular political agendas. Depending on the weight given to particular national goals, different policies can be situated in this hierarchy. For instance, an agriculture policy that focuses on creating a million new jobs will trump a policy that places environmental sustainability before job creation. Similarly, debates about land reform often juxtapose social justice goals and sustaining food security (national food production). The hierarchy therefore shifts according to the particular issue or goal, as well as who is promoting it, with serious implications for future policies to promote sustainable agriculture. As articulated by du Toit (2015) a *laissez-faire* process has arisen in which multiple factions struggle for control of the state, with little or no leadership from above. A powerful example is that of the DRDLR is driving a policy about capping land size, which runs contrary to the prevailing approach of DAFF to support farm consolidation.

At the same time, agricultural and food problems are genuinely deeply rooted and difficult to resolve, partly because of the economic growth path currently being pursued. The pressures of economic growth and competition have created a dynamic pushing millions of people out of land-based employment, with little chance of finding formal or informal employment in the non-farm sector. This economic growth path is part of a vicious cycle as the liberalisation and deregulation policies, encapsulated in many agriculture-focused policies, in turn drive farm consolidation and exclusion. As expected, bigger and better positioned players have benefited: agribusiness, processors and powerful supermarkets increasingly control agriculture. The benefits to the big players further intensify marginalisation of small, emergent black farmers, leading to a further livelihood loss and unemployment in rural areas, and deepening rural poverty and inequality.

Nevertheless, the complexity could be addressed – or at very least acknowledged – in broader policy processes if political direction and will existed. Addressing the complexity is currently impossible since heterodoxy is encouraged and the situation is manipulated to suit the status quo.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND POLICYMAKING

It is essential to move beyond a naïve expectation that policy will provide objective solutions to deep-seated problems. Policy is crafted through various forces encompassing allegiances and power, and populist politics, embedded in ideological heterodoxy. Without explicitly recognising the power play behind certain policies, and the political opportunities available due to a lack of coherence, policy recommendations and advice will achieve little. Therefore, policy should not be seen as singularly important in eliciting change: politics and power are equally important in understanding the direction of policy processes.

Looking critically at food and agriculture policy over the past decade, it is not surprising that little has been achieved by leaving policy largely to a government department that is poorly equipped – administratively and conceptually – to deal with the interwoven priorities of poverty and hunger. Food insecurity is not a technical issue that can be addressed by departmental programmes. Nor is it an economic question dealt with in an skewed market. It requires a coordinated approach that

¹ A problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognise.

has both political will and resourcing, including elements of immediate and direct relief, and structural and institutional change to address distribution problems. Because food security is a societal issue, it is problematic to leave food system policymaking and governance to government. One of the main challenges facing food security policymaking is the interdependence of actors, activities and problems, which defy the efficacy of traditional modes and strategies of governance. The interdependence of actors, activities and problems is a key reason why the policy environment has struggled to achieve the intended outcomes. It is worth reflecting that the consultations feeding into developing the *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy* and implementing the plan are not promising in terms of engaging adequately with non-state actors.

Policymakers need to acknowledge the importance of a wide range of actors in both the formal and informal food system and recognise that the informal sector can contribute to improved productivity, working conditions and social protection. The policy context has not recognised informal actors, instead seeing the formal sector as the main source of employment, growth and equity. Without policy coherence and ultimately a societal response, poor recognition aggravates prevailing and immediate hunger, which is linked to social unhappiness. Currently high child undernourishment, will also increase, with far-reaching implications for future generations.

The above examples reveal that governance arrangements for a complex food system must include an array of actors and interest groups. However, the different positions and perspectives offered by various polarised actors, colour discussions and debates about a more equitable, just and efficient future food system. Policy responses have often been muted in their efforts to remedy the food system, largely due to its complexity, and powerful interests and agendas across the political spectrum.

Critically, acknowledging that food is where many socio-economic and environmental issues converge, so providing evidence to policymakers about food security must be based on transdisciplinary research. The distinction between "transdisciplinary" and "interdisciplinary" research is key: the latter constitutes research between different academic disciplines, while the former entails cross-departmental research that recognises knowledge beyond the academic sphere. Thus, transdisciplinary approaches recognise that it is not just scientific knowledge that is relevant in resolving society's persistent problems, but also social knowledge or experiential knowledge (Drimie&McLachlan 2013). As such, transdisciplinary research is a powerful tool for engaging actors outside the state, in order to produce socially relevant and new scientific knowledge and insight.

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