



**African
Food Systems
Transformation
Collective**



African Food Systems Transformation Collective
BRIEF SERIES | 12

Just Food System Transitions



Established by



Convened by



This brief is part of a series produced by
the African Food Systems Transformation Collective (AFSTC).

You can access the other briefs in the series at africanclimatefoundation.org

Author	Department and institution
Haidee Swanby	Independent researcher, South Africa
Andrew Bennie	Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), South Africa
Malik Dasoo (Editor)	African Climate Foundation, South Africa
Florian Kroll (Editor)	DSTI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Corresponding author	Department and institution
Andrew Bennie	Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), South Africa Tel: +27 72 278 4315 Email: andrew.bennie@iej.org.za

Series editor	Department and institution
Florian Kroll	DSTI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

SUMMARY

This brief proposes that, in light of limits to existing food system advocacy in Africa, climate change impacts, the imposition of food system industrialisation, and increasingly urbanised populations, greater philanthropic support would be extremely valuable to movement building and campaigning approaches that bring a much wider set of sectors beyond farmers into advocacy for more just and resilient food systems. We further suggest that a just transition framing can provide an important umbrella through which to do so.

A deep, just transition approach calls on us to place human rights at the heart of new and emerging food systems. This means dismantling arrangements that incentivise or tolerate poor working conditions, ensuring that women are uplifted, addressing historical structural inequities and making healthy, diverse and appropriate food accessible and affordable. A deep, just food system transition approach provides new and multiple pathways to advocate for fair, sustainable and resilient food systems in Africa. It calls for organising and connecting dots across sectors and initiatives through practice and advocacy. It also requires advocating across multiple levels of governance, while ensuring that those who are most marginalised are included, acknowledged and have power to contribute to new solutions and arrangements. To do this, we need to

strengthen cross-sectoral dialogue, new ways of working, and co-creation of knowledge.

South Africa and a just food system transition

Unlike much of the rest of Africa, South Africa's food system is dominated by a large-scale industrial production system that was built in the apartheid era, largely through land dispossession, cheap labour and protectionist policy. Today, agricultural production at economies of scale feeds into corporate dominated value chains that are highly concentrated. A parallel food system operates on the periphery, characterised by smallholder producers and informal markets supplied by the concentrated core.

We suggest that using South Africa's food system is nonetheless important for generating insights and recommendations relevant to a broader African content. First, efforts to 'modernise' and industrialise food systems on the rest of the continent are a strong feature of policy. Second, in this, South Africa's industrial food system is a benchmark of success on the continent. Thirdly, because South Africa's dominant food system was industrialised long ago, and is beset by numerous problems of ecological impact, inequality



and unjust power relations, it provides a cautionary case for the rest of Africa about the need instead for a just transition towards food sovereignty and agroecology.

Advocacy for a just food system transition

Advocating for a just transition in food systems is complex, but it also provides exciting opportunities for civil society, government and donors to approach such work in new ways. This includes breaching long-standing practical and political silos. The case studies in this brief show the promise of supporting multi-actor and cross-sectoral platforms for wider movement and campaign building in pursuit of a just transition. This work needs to be informed by local contexts and the needs and solutions of those who are most affected by food insecurity, climate change and exploitation in the food system. Surfacing local contexts, building local agency and co-creating new knowledge can be slow work. This can be challenging for funders due to the organic and iterative nature of such work, where process may be more important than discrete outputs. However, it can nonetheless produce promising results in terms of building grassroots agency, strengthened cross-sectoral connections and action, and policy change.

Key recommendations for philanthropic action

To help form and strengthen cross-sectoral coalitions to advocate for just food system transitions, the brief recommends the following to philanthropies:

- 1. Invest in multi-actor, cross sectoral platforms and coalitions:** A food system lens calls for organising and policy interventions beyond only farming. Platforms that bring together a cross-sector of organisations – labour unions, informal worker organisations, smallholder farmers, farm and food workers, small entrepreneurs, communities and NGOs – can help bring a wider coalition of actors to bear on food system change for a just transition, by convening, dialogue and research to find common entry points between these sectors and actors. This requires support for convening and co-creation processes, participatory and multi-disciplinary research, and collective policy engagement – a research–advocacy–policy nexus.
- 2. Invest in network health and infrastructure:** The above requires funding to keep strengthening connections on an ongoing basis. It requires support for convening, research and policy engagement, but it also requires support for the staff and resources needed for maintaining relationships and carrying out varying and iterative relationship-building activities. These could include analysing content and following policy processes, informing coalitions of opportunities and developments, having the agility for coalitions to use ad hoc opportunities as they arise, creating space for reflection and learning, and social media maintenance.
- 3. Funding for context-based solutions is sometimes preferred over one-size-fits all solutions:** Innovations and outcomes have to operate at scale in order to achieve the food system shifts we need for a just transition. At the same time, an emphasis only on initiatives that can be ‘scaled up’ may undermine contextually appropriate innovation and solutions. Furthermore, in some cases what may be dismissed as duplication of work already being done can instead be valued as diversity and resilience. Philanthropic support should strike a balance between both.
- 4. Explore new grant-making practices that build agency:** This may be achieved by developing monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms that reward continued improved judgement and practice and measures impacts that are meaningful to beneficiaries.
- 5. More direct funding to grassroots alternatives and processes:** There are pockets of resilience and innovation for transformed food systems that are practical working examples towards adaptation and mitigation. These also provide an important basis for wider research and policy advocacy, and so support should go to these initiatives in conjunction with support for convening, research and policy engagement.
- 6. Long-term funding is needed:** Funders need to stand alongside coalitions as they establish, deepen and unfold. Long-term funding is also needed for institutions and organisations to do multi-year exploratory research and follow-up.
- 7. Funders may want to fund across sectors and break silos that they may have participated in:** This is important in ensuring that organisations from different sectors have the financial capacity to participate in collaborations, but also that food system interventions important to different sectors or constituencies are supported. This includes activities that help foster stronger social connections between actors from different sectors and different currents in the food movement, such as an annual retreat.

INTRODUCTION

The world is still far off track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero Hunger, with the global prevalence of undernourishment persisting at nearly the same level for three consecutive years after having risen sharply in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO et al. 2024). One out of every five people in Africa faces hunger, and one-third of people in the world – about 2.8 billion – could not afford a healthy diet in 2022 (FAO et al. 2023). There is an urgent need to attend to this crisis and create resilient food systems in the face of increasing shocks related to climate change, environmental degradation and financial crises. African advocacy on these issues has historically focused on production, that is, on agriculture, seed systems and agroecology. Applying a **just transition** lens to food systems policy and development programmes in African advocacy can build on this approach by surfacing and seeking greater connections across a broader range

of actors in the food system, with the aim of creating new networks and pathways for change.

This brief explains why approaching the transformation of African food systems through the lens of a just transition is a priority approach; how this could integrate support for work at the intersections of research, policy and advocacy across and between a range of stakeholders; and why South Africa may be a valuable starting point for supporting such work. It also reflects on experiences and learnings for just transition research and advocacy from two case studies in South Africa in which multi-actor coalitions worked together towards food systems transformation. Finally, this brief gleans insights from the case studies, as well as ongoing stakeholder consultations, to make recommendations to philanthropies who would fund this pioneering approach in South Africa.



MOTIVATION

The need for a just food system transition

Global food systems¹ contribute about one third of anthropogenic greenhouse gases (GHG), while also being the largest cause of biodiversity loss (Bennie et al. 2023). Food systems are also deeply vulnerable to climate change impacts. Africa is the continent most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, even though the continent contributes only about 4% of global GHG emissions (AfDB 2024).

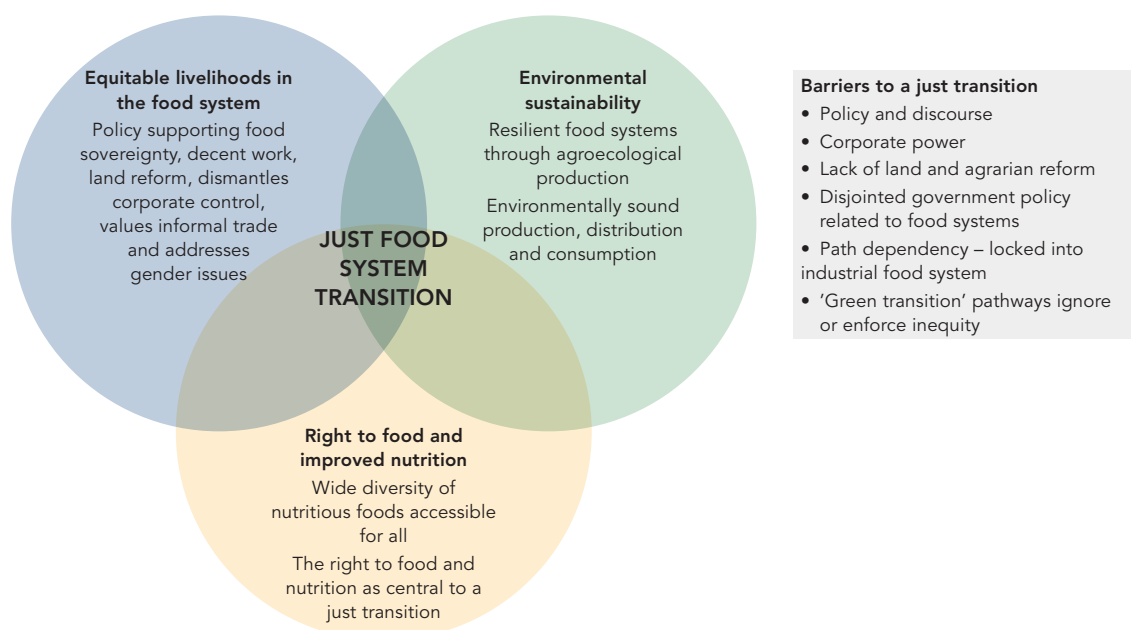
Making agri-food systems more resilient in the face of increasing shocks is now more urgent than ever. Resilient food systems are ones that can recover, adapt and transform in these contexts, and must also be more equitable and sustainable in order to support all dimensions of food security, including the role of trade, environmental stability, access to healthy diets, inclusive and equitable employment, and human rights (HLPE 2024).

The notion of the 'just transition' originally emerged from the labour sector. It refers to the process of shifting an

industry towards a sustainable and resilient set of practices and processes in ways that do not burden workers and communities, and also ensures broad social inclusion and equity in the transition's benefits. A just transition should aim for a food system that is ecologically resilient and regenerative, realises decent work and equitable livelihoods, and meets the right to food and nutrition (Bennie et al. 2023).

Achieving a just transition therefore requires significant transformations. Civil society allies in South Africa have been exploring discourse and practice related to a just transition in South African food systems. They have found that their notion of a deep just transition differs significantly to the just transition envisioned by government or sectoral actors in food system value chains. The mainstream adoption of the term 'just transition' tends to focus on carbon neutrality, with less attention to human rights, structural inequity or deeper ecological transformations. A deeper just transition therefore needs to be guided by

FIGURE 1: WHAT A JUST FOOD SYSTEM SHOULD ACHIEVE AND BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING IT



Source: compiled from *Towards a Just Transition in South Africa's food system. Fact sheet 1.* <https://tinyurl.com/y2rp9uvv>

principles like a caring rights-based economy, an economy-wide approach, transformations in ownership, distribution and access to resources, and democracy (see Bennie et al. 2023).

However, achieving a deep just food system transition faces challenges: we are locked into a 'path dependency' of industrial agri-food systems operating at scale, and there are powerful vested interests that continue to benefit from this arrangement. Overcoming this path dependency suggests the need for building progressive multi-disciplinary, multi-actor and multi-sectoral coalitions to co-create and advocate for viable development strategies to drive long-term change that considers trade-offs, costs and countervailing forces (Bennie et al. 2023). The real work implied in this is a long-term, iterative process of relationship building within and across sectors with groups that have not historically collaborated, and who do not necessarily have shared language, priorities, political goals or values.

Knowledge-making for advocacy and coalition building

Coalitions for transformative change would need to be supported through research which identifies the existing and potential threats to social equity arising through the differing sustainability transition pathways in the agro-industries. For example, together with existing economic patterns tending towards concentration and scale, an ecological transition based on increasing technological solutions may further disadvantage less well-resourced farmers and workers and lead to further exclusion and inequality. Further research is needed to assess existing adaptation strategies by main actors in specific agro-industries and their impacts, particularly on workers in those value chains. This research should also surface the potential benefits a just transition may contribute. For example, a just food system transition may create jobs through dismantling unjust land ownership patterns and corporate capture of value chains that have historically locked out small-scale producers and entrepreneurs. Just transition frameworks produced through these coalitions need to be co-created from a place of deep democracy and emerge from the bottom-up, rooted in context, and prioritise the needs of communities and social partners. This approach can be slow, complex and challenging, necessitating new ways of working together that may also entail new approaches in grant making to ensure that this work is effectively supported and contributes to ending hunger on the African continent.

Hunger and African agri-food systems

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of hunger and food insecurity globally. In 2022 it was estimated that 140 million people across 35 African countries were suffering acute food insecurity, showing an annual increase of 17% (20 million people) (Trautman et al. 2023). This is aggravated by climate change impacts on African food systems, which are projected to result in at least 30 million more people at risk of hunger by 2030. This is happening even as the continent's food systems are rapidly transforming due to high urbanisation, expected to reach 65% by 2050 (Trautman et al. 2023).

In 2022 it was estimated that 140 million people across 35 African countries were suffering acute food insecurity, showing an annual increase of 17%

Hunger in Africa has historically been framed as a problem caused by inferior traditional production methods and agricultural resources, to be cured by the 'modernisation' of agriculture on the continent and including African farmers in global economic circuits. Often influenced by corporate interests, national and continental policies increasingly foreground commercialisation, technological transfer and productivity, essentially creating enabling environments for agribusiness that displace local food systems, erode local agrobiodiversity and undermine food sovereignty (CSIPM 2023). For example, a major focus of commercialisation policies is seed systems, with the aim of increasing the provision through private companies of hybrid seeds to farmers, together with supportive legal frameworks. However, this undermines farmers' seed systems and sovereignty by increasing dependence on private sector seed and associated artificial inputs like fertiliser and pesticides, placing legal restrictions on farmer use of seed, and reducing biodiversity (which is critical to climate change adaptation). This also has distinctly gendered impacts, given the primary role of women small-scale farmers in maintaining and reproducing agricultural diversity for food security and nutrition.

A further possible headwind facing African smallholder farmers, particularly those producing exports like coffee and cocoa, is mitigation policies in destination countries and regions, such as the European Union Deforestation

Regulation, which will come into force at the end of 2025. African farmers will need to prove that the commodities they export to the European Union (EU), such as coffee, do not come from deforested lands. However, most smallholder farmers do not have monitoring systems that enable them to comply. This raises questions about the burden of transition.

The resilience, reproduction and strengthening of African food systems and their important qualities like agrobiodiversity, nutrition and ecologically friendly methods face a number of challenges. Producers, small food entrepreneurs, consumers and women and youth of Africa, and the assemblages² in which they participate – from local to global scales – also offer important opportunities for the emergence of resilient and equitable food systems that are able to effectively function amidst the multiple crises facing the continent, and which should provide an important framing for the just transition.

South Africa's agri-food system: a cautionary tale

African policy trajectories suggest that South Africa's agricultural sector is the aspiration for the rest of the continent, with policies aimed at enabling foreign investment to modernise African agriculture. However, while modernisation is equated with technological progress and financial growth, it is instructive to note the problems in South Africa's agro-food system, which provide a good example of the urgent need for a just transition lens to food system transformation.

The system is highly unequal. On the one hand, the dominant agricultural system is highly industrialised. Its roots lie in apartheid, built on land dispossession, cheap labour and protectionist policies and subsidies for white, large-scale farmers. Today, about 15 000 (predominantly white-owned) large-scale farms produce the bulk of South Africa's food (Hodge et al. 2021). This is then provisioned through a highly concentrated, corporate-controlled distribution, processing, manufacturing and retailing network.

On the other hand, is a system of some 2.3 million Black smallholder farmers producing for their own households, with about 230 000 of these producing for markets (Greenber 2015). These farmers often produce on marginal, unserved land with scant technical, financial or other support. For example, Black smallholders only use about 5% of the water used by the agricultural sector, with

Black women smallholders only accessing about 1% of that (Tekwa & Adesina 2023). A lacklustre post-apartheid land and agrarian reform programme has largely left this unequal structure intact (Bennie et al. 2023).

This inequality extends to patterns of hunger and food insecurity. The country is technically categorised as food secure at a national level because it produces enough volume and diversity to feed the population. But at household level 64% of the population experience some level of food insecurity, while almost a third of children under five are stunted (HSRC 2024). South Africa's food system reproduces the deep, racialised inequality in the society, with stunting, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) affecting poor Black populations the most. These class inequalities are also reproduced through labour conditions across the agro-industries (Bennie et al. 2023).

These existing injustices intersect with and are potentially intensified by climate change. Agriculture and associated agro-industries are extremely vulnerable to climate impacts, which raises the need for adaptation. The industrialised nature of the system means it contributes to emissions, causing climate change and other environmental problems, and so mitigation strategies are also needed. Local developments in the climate policy space reflect an increasing awareness of the urgent need to address the climate impacts and vulnerabilities of food systems. The country's new Climate Change Act of 2024 requires all government departments to align their policies and measures around just transition concerns, defined as the 'shift towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society and ecologically sustainable economies and societies which contribute toward the creation of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty' (South African Government 2024: 10).

There is a tendency in existing agricultural policy to focus mitigation and adaptation interventions on technical tweaks to the industrial production system. However, a just transition research and advocacy approach points to the need for deeper technical, social and economic shifts in the context of climate change. This would also have to confront the disjointed and siloed context of food system policy in South Africa (Kushitor et al. 2022). Just transition can provide an important framing to bring multiple, cross-sectoral actors together to define, from their different vantage points in the food system, common priorities and entry points for change. This potential is illustrated by two case studies.

CASE STUDIES

It is clear that advocacy and development initiatives need now to emerge from multi-stakeholder efforts that are acutely attuned to cross-sectoral grassroots realities (beyond only smallholder farmers) if we are to offer viable pathways to just transition in our food systems. We offer two case studies of coalitions that have researched food-related issues and policies and advocate for more rights-

centred policy and practice in South African food systems. These offer lessons on methodologies to work towards a just food system transition and embody the just transition principles laid out earlier in this document, and which can further clarify to grant-makers what to support and how to support it in ways that build social and practical momentum for just transition.

National Policy Dialogue on a Just Transition and Adaptation in the South African Agri-Food System

The National Policy Dialogue on a Just Transition and Adaptation in the South African Agri-Food System was convened by eight civil society and labour organisations in September 2023. Its overarching aim was to contribute to building a more coordinated voice and agenda between civil society, workers and trade unions, informal traders, smallholder farmers and communities on key policy priorities for a just food system transition. In the context of the ability of incumbent interests (i.e. corporate actors and agribusiness) to shape policy, a wider cross-constituency coalition was seen to be required to exert greater influence on policy-making and implementation in a more progressive, just transition direction.

Another important implication for funders is to stand alongside actors for a longer term, to give them the time to build and deepen processes without rushing steps

Because of poor government-initiated platforms for participation, a key aim of the process initiated by the National Policy Dialogue is to create an ongoing space of participation for a cross-sector of constituencies (an 'invented space'), beyond only smallholder farmers, to co-produce and define their issues and advocate for

them in connected-up policy advocacy framed by the just transition. The Dialogue was convened in a deliberative and participatory way. Through the processes leading up to the Dialogue, at the Dialogue itself and afterwards, a Civil Society Framework for a Food System Just Transition was developed, of common principles and criteria that unite the different sectors. This acts as a guide for collective policy engagement and practice on the ground and is being used in policy interventions.

Reflections for funders

An implication for funders from this process is the importance of funding collaboration. However, this collaboration must be organic, and not imposed by the funder. An approach should be therefore to nurture such collaboration, which includes funding salaries, as human time to maintain organisation and momentum of the process is a critical need. Another important implication for funders is to stand alongside actors for a longer term, to give them the time to build and deepen processes without rushing steps and lay a strong foundation. Lastly, it is important that practical activities on the ground are still strongly supported, and linked to participatory research, to help facilitate and support the grassroots realities that ultimately provide the foundation for sustained policy engagement and where just transition policy should impact the most.

Food Agency Cape Town: Empowerment through community research

Research is a critical component in informing and enabling effective advocacy and policy work for a just food system transition. Critical in this also is the connection between research and agency, which is illustrated by the experience of Food Agency Cape Town (FACT). FACT is a community-based organisation that emerged to respond to, and counter, the experience of extractivist research in their communities by beginning to produce their own research, disseminating the findings within their communities, and developing strategies and implementation plans based on their findings. It was also formed to bring confident and informed community voices into relevant policy spaces in the Western Cape Province, which they felt were dominated by academics, NGOs and the private sector. FACT started in 2016 when Humboldt University's Centre for Rural Development (SLE) brought together an international, interdisciplinary team of practitioners and scientists, including universities in Maputo (Mozambique), Cape Town (South Africa) and Berlin (Germany) as well as NGOs and government structures active in urban agriculture.

The important overall lesson is the importance of linking local agency and practice of different constituencies/sectors with research in just food system advocacy and policy work

FACT has not explicitly framed their work within a just transition framework. However, the objectives and principles of the actors that have led to the emergence of this organisation accord with what an important part of a more just food system looks like – that is, to nurture microfarmers' capacity for livelihoods from ecological food production and short-chain distribution, to make nutritious food available in their neighbourhoods, and to build individual agency around food-related decisions through research and capacity building to understand their food system through an intersectional lens. The important overall lesson is the importance of linking local agency and practice of different constituencies/sectors with research in just food system advocacy and policy work.

Reflections for funders

Community members who were involved in this process were shocked to learn, through their own research in their communities, of the profound poverty and suffering around them – and to become recognised experts, with their names on a peer-reviewed study, as well as lived experience. They continue to document and participate in advocacy opportunities to share the reality of food insecurity in townships, share their aspirations for hyper-local, just, healthy and ecologically oriented food systems with policy-makers.

FACT says that they are no longer just thinking about farming, but their understanding has been radically and



positively broadened to understand food, nutrition, food systems and power relations. This illustrates important linkages between local agency, research and wider just food system transition concerns and action.

Funders, NGOs and academics may measure success in terms of outputs, while success is measured and processes are valued in different terms on the ground. Measures of success from FACT members' standpoint included things like broadened and critical thinking in the community, stable relationships and trust, financial stability and peace of mind, confidence to participate in policy and other arenas where 'experts' dominate, and a firm sense of dignity, rather than just ticked boxes on how many workshops were held.

Further, despite all heartfelt desires for equality, the power dynamics in multi-stakeholder coalitions, between highly educated and less educated, and between those

who give and those who receive money, remains. During consultations with academics affiliated with FACT, it was suggested that more courageous self-reflection is needed on the part of those who hold power in such relationships, including funders.

The multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary model that brought together academic and technical expertise, coupled with participatory research methods, produced powerful outputs. This included context-based training manuals and project plans as well as hard evidence that formally acknowledges community researchers. Importantly, it built true agency and the possibility for grassroots analysis to be shared at higher levels. Although the collective does not have an explicit just transition framework to guide their work, their methodology exemplifies just transition ideals and goes a long way to showing the work needed for truly democratic policy-making towards just food systems, and which should be appropriately supported.

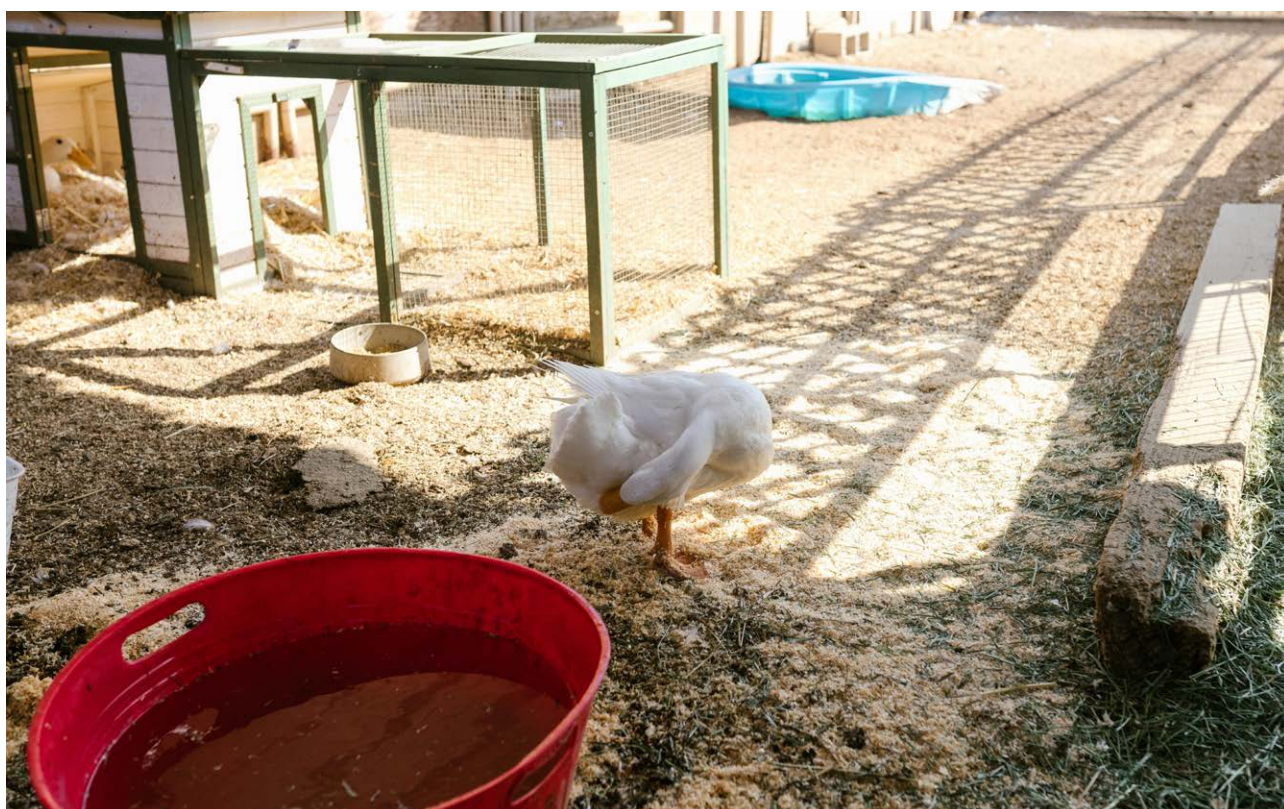


DISCUSSION

In the face of persistent food and nutrition insecurity in the context of multiple global crises, including climate change, government policies often continue to recreate the status quo. However, multi-actor and multi-disciplinary research and advocacy undertaken by coalitions with a shared aim of just food system transitions are already emerging and showing their worth. Understanding the different types of vulnerabilities of agriculture and food systems, and their implications for the different actors involved, will set the stage for civil society coalitions to catalyse policy measures needed to enhance the resilience of local, regional and global food systems. These include consideration of inclusive and just employment and livelihood opportunities, the role of trade, environmental sustainability, access to affordable healthy diets and equitable food environments, underpinned by the realisation of human rights. A key component of the work of these coalitions is to carry out research to inform pathways and policy advocacy to make structural and far-reaching changes to our food system.

In the face of persistent food and nutrition insecurity in the context of multiple global crises, including climate change, government policies often continue to recreate the status quo

The funding of these coalitions, which may be emergent, organic and coalescing around policy or other opportunities, is vital for this work to happen. However, funding and resources for this work remain scarce. Key things that need to be funded include: salaries for people coordinating coalition efforts and tracking policy; opportunities and platforms to meet; funding for relationship building across sectors and with policy-makers; long-term funding for exploratory research; long-term funding to allow coalitions to build relationships; and funding that is more directly available to grassroots partners that is fairly simple to manage.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively support a just food system transition across Africa, funders can adopt key principles derived from research into complexity models – as outlined below. Our recommendations revolve around supporting elements

that are important in building cross-sectoral coordination, research, policy engagement and advocacy coalitions aimed at advancing just food system transitions.

1. Invest in multi-actor, cross sectoral platforms and coalitions

A food system lens calls for organising and policy interventions beyond only farming. Platforms that bring together a cross-sector of organisations – labour unions, informal worker organisations, smallholder farmers, farm and food workers, small entrepreneurs, communities and NGOs – can help bring a wider coalition of actors to bear on food system change for a just transition, by convening, dialogue and research to find common entry points between these sectors and actors. This requires support for convening and co-creation processes, participatory and multi-disciplinary research, and collective policy engagement – a research–advocacy–policy nexus.

2. Invest in networking and relationship building

- **Promote healthy relationships:** Funders should prioritise investments that build trustful relationships among actors within the food system. This includes fostering skills and creating effective communication channels. This can also include events aimed less at activity planning and more simply at perspective and experience sharing, spending quality time together, and relationship and trust building, especially among people from different sectors as well as from different political currents in the food movement. Such relationships and trust are an important foundation for stronger just food system transition coalitions. An example is an annual food justice activist retreat, an idea raised in a consultation with the convenors of the National Policy Dialogue.
- **Support systemic interactions:** Recognise that successful outcomes stem from the interactions of people within the entire system rather than isolated interventions. Acknowledge and empower local agency, and consider the long-term, iterative processes of relationship building and research development.

3. Foster motivation among stakeholders

- **Support good faith actions:** Acknowledge that actors in the food system do not require incentivisation to act positively; instead, they need support to enhance their judgement and practices.
- **Create enabling environments:** Design funding frameworks that promote honest communication, reflection and constructive feedback. This approach counters the tendency to manipulate reporting metrics and encourages authentic engagement with funded initiatives.

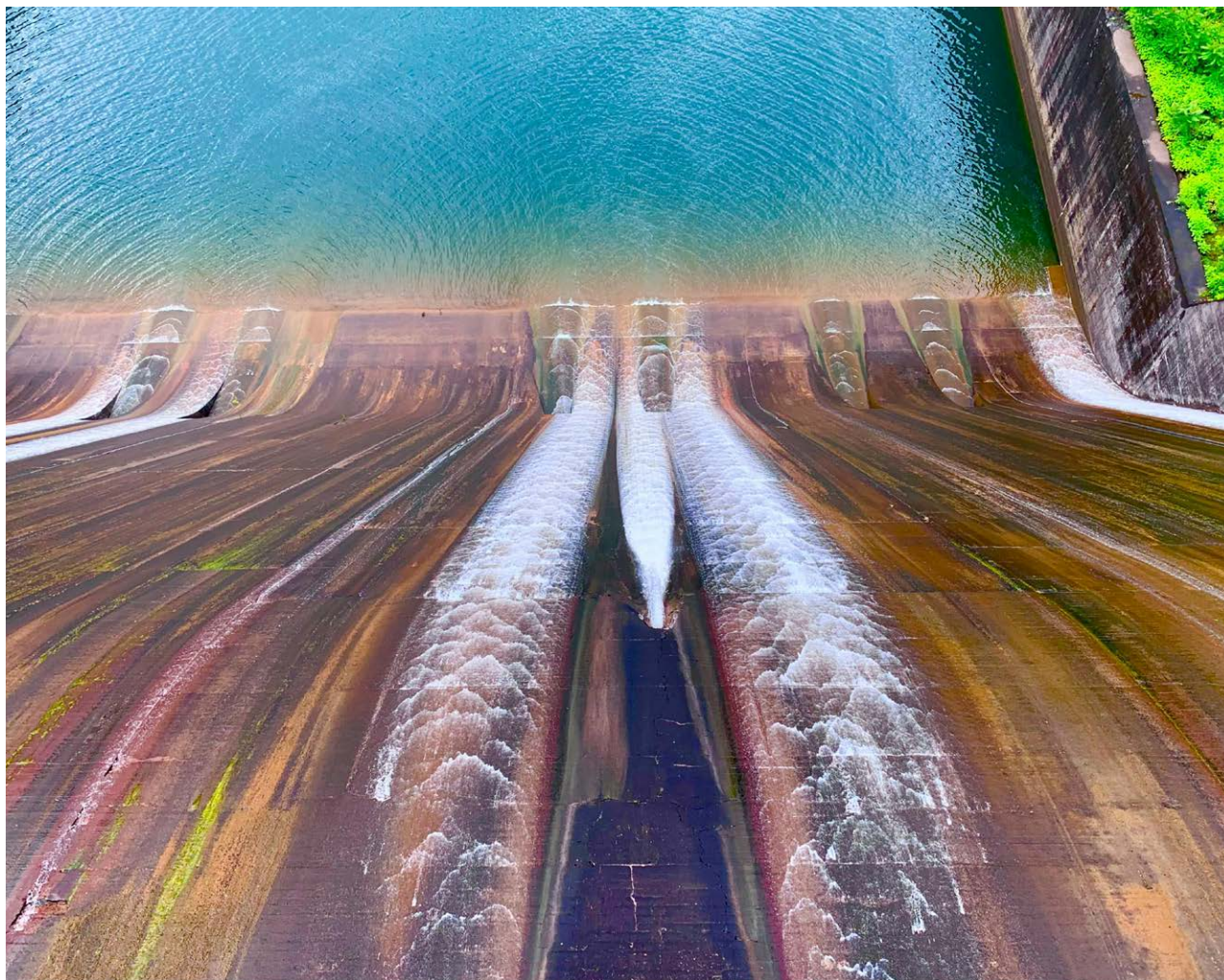
4. Emphasise learning and adaptation

- **Prioritise learning over pre-developed outcomes:** Shift the focus from rigid outcome metrics to valuing the learning process. This shift involves developing monitoring practices that assess the genuine impact of initiatives rather than superficial indicators.
- **Set relevant indicators:** Collaborate with stakeholders to create indicators that measure what truly matters for the just food system transition, ensuring that these metrics reflect the realities of the participants' experiences and learning journeys.

5. Additional recommendations

During our consultations and case study collection, the following recommendations were made:

- Indicators should reflect a value of process; building relationships, networks and shared agendas across sectors and funding is needed for these kinds of activities.
- Links to grassroots alternatives and processes that are innovating and implementing adaptation and mitigation solutions, and foreground structural changes to build equity and human rights are vital, and more direct funding to the ground is needed.
- Support coalitions' capacity to contest cases of injustice as rallying points for movement-building.
- Funding for salaries for those who are building coalitions and following policy processes is key, in order to support a sustained approach.
- Long-term funding is needed; funders need to stand alongside coalitions as they establish foundations, deepen and unfold. Long-term funding is also needed for multi-year exploratory research and follow-up.
- The requirement for initiatives to be appropriate for scaling-up is not always fitting. Context-based solutions are preferred over one-size-fits all solutions. The 'scaling up' is the coalition, which is a container for initiatives emerging at various scales.
- We are used to trying not to duplicate work or worry if there are a number of networks doing similar things. However, what may look like duplication to funders could also represent diversity and resilience. That is, by having multiple initiatives funded, if one falters there are others still taking the work forward.
- Funders may want to fund across sectors and break silos that they may have participated in. An annual retreat discussed above is one mechanism to help foster the relationships and trust to do so.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the African Climate Foundation (ACF) for the support in producing this brief through the African Food Systems Transformation Collective. Thank you to members of the National Policy Dialogue and Food Agency Cape Town (FACT) for making time to discuss your experiences, perspectives and needs around research and advocacy for a just food system transition. Thank you to Florian Kroll (AFSTC), Irene Karani (ACF) and Malik Dasoo (ACF) for your editorial guidance, and to reviewers for valuable feedback that helped shape the final product. Thank you also to participants, other brief authors and philanthropy representatives at the AFSTC gathering in Kigali, Rwanda in October 2024 for constructive feedback, discussions and guidance.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- African Development Bank Group (2024) Focus on Africa. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop28/focus-africa#:~:text=Since%20the%20beginning%20of%202023,adverse%20impacts%20of%20climate%20change>
- Bennie A, Suliman L & Bowman A (2023) Towards a just transition in the South African food system – key issues and competing perspectives. Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ). Available at: <https://www.iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IEJ-Towards-a-Just-Transition-in-the-South-African-Food-System-Discussion-paper-May-2023.pdf>
- Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) (2023) African Civil Society Assessment of the UNFSS National Pathways. Available at: https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Policy_Brief_UNFSS_Africa_25-July.pdf
- Committee for World Food Security (CFS) (2024) Building resilient food systems HLPE-FSN consultation on the scope of the report. FAO. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/fsnforum/consultation/building-resilient-food-systems-hlpe-scope-report>
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2023) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum. Rome: FAO
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP & WHO (2024) In Brief to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. Rome: FAO. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1276en>
- FAO, Alliance of Bioersivity International & CIAT (2021) Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems: Insights on Sustainability and Resilience from the Front Line of Climate Change. Rome: FOA. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb5131en/cb5131en.pdf>
- Greenber S (2015) Agrarian reform and South Africa's agro-food system. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 42(5): 957-979
- HLPE (2024) Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems to achieve food security and nutrition, in the context of urbanization and rural transformation. Rome: CFS HLPE-FSN
- Hodge J, Govinda H, Leuner R & Mkwanazi S (2021) Measuring Concentration and Participation in the South African Economy: Levels and Trends. Summary Report of Findings and Recommendations. Competition Commission
- HSRC (2024) 2024 National Food and Nutrition Security Survey National Report. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council
- Knight AD, Lowe T, Brossard M & Watson J (2017) A whole new world: funding and commissioning in complexity. Northumbria University and Collaborate CIC. Available at: <https://collaboratecic.com/insights-and-resources/a-whole-new-world-funding-and-commissioning-in-complexity/>
- Kushitor SB, Drimie S, Davids R et al. (2022) The complex challenge of governing food systems: The case of South African food policy. *Food Sec.* 14: 883–896 (2022). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-022-01258-z>
- Paganini N, Adams H, Bokolo K, Buthelezi N, Hansmann J, Isaacs W, Kweza N, Mewes A, Nyaba H, Qamata V, Reich V, Reigl M, Sander L & Swanby H (2021) Agency in South Africa's food systems. A food justice perspective of food security in the Cape Flats and St. Helena Bay during the COVID-19 pandemic. SLE Publication Series S285. Berlin
- South African Government (2024) Climate Change Act No. 22 of 2024. Cape Town: Government Gazette
- Tekwa N & Adesina JO (2023) Land, water, and gender questions in South Africa: A transformative social policy perspective. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 12(1): 72-97
- Trautman S, Chevallier R, Cramer L, Gosling A & Mutamba M (2023) Africa Common Position on Food Systems: A summary of the official Africa Common Position presented in September 2021 as part of the United Nations Food Systems Summit. Information Note, June 2023. African Union Development Agency, NEPAD

ENDNOTES

- 1 A food system can be broadly defined as encompassing a web of actors, processes and interactions involved in inputs, production, processing, and distribution and consumption of food, which interact with the environmental, political, social and economic contexts. Food systems operate at multiple scales: the local level is influenced by national, regional and international policy, while national food systems' architectures are influenced by local and international practices and pressures.
- 2 Assemblage describes the dynamic process of a constellation in which a composition of heterogeneous elements forms a provisional socio-spatial relation but is always subject to change.



**African
Food Systems
Transformation
Collective**

African Food Systems Transformation Collective

This network of researchers and food systems development experts collaborates to inform philanthropies, governments and development finance organisations on funding strategies to promote transitions to sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems across Africa.

To ensure a high standard of evidence-informed recommendations, briefs in this series were rigorously reviewed by peers within the AFSTC, including fellow researchers and members of the advisory committee.

Rights and Permissions

Attribution – Please cite the work as follows:

Swanby H, Bennie A, Dasoo M & Kroll F (2025) African Food Systems Transformation Brief 12: Just Food System Transitions. African Food Systems Transformation Collective. Cape Town, South Africa.

Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IG

Established by



Convened by

