



# HOW CAN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEM POLICIES IMPROVE NUTRITION?

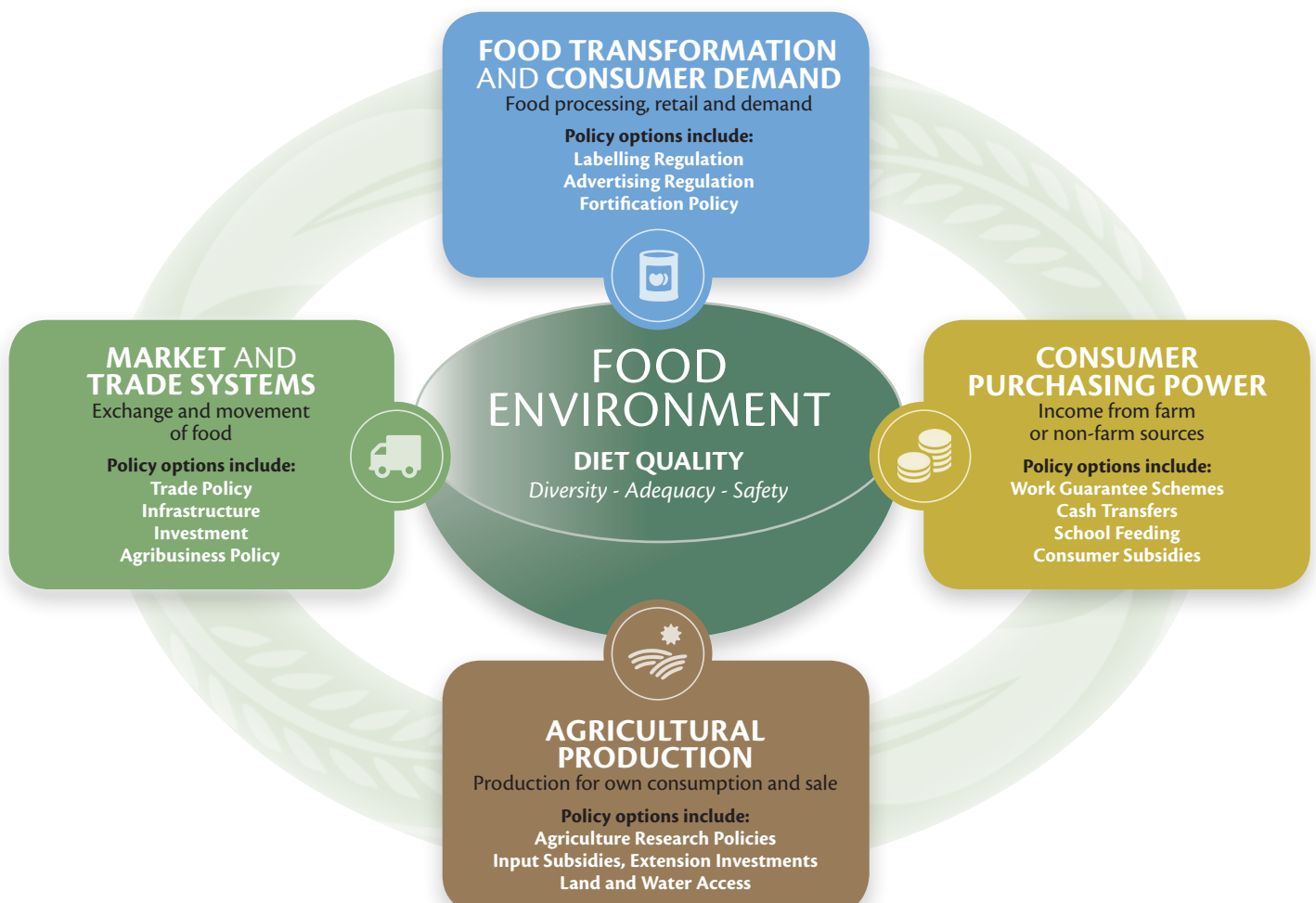
Nutrition is not about just feeding people, it is about fuelling growth – the growth of individuals, communities and entire nations. Malnutrition – whether it results from a lack of nutrients, the overconsumption of calories or a poor quality diet – inhibits people from thriving. Without a healthy population, nations cannot reach their full potential.

Food and agriculture policies are critical in influencing what foods are available and accessible to consumers. As food systems evolve to address the challenges of population growth, global trade and environmental change, we should ensure that these systems do not just help to feed – they help to nourish. To improve nutrition for all, we need to make changes in the food we produce, and how it is processed, transported, marketed and consumed.

Policy actions and investment across the food system can contribute to improving nutrition outcomes. Focusing on food systems, new policies can be developed and old policies modified in four key domains:

- **AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**
- **MARKETS AND TRADE SYSTEMS**
- **CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER**
- **FOOD TRANSFORMATION AND CONSUMER DEMAND**

These four aspects of the food system shape the food environment within which people make food choices, which in turn determines the quality of their diet. Diet quality is a measure of good nutrition.



# POLICY OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

No single policy can alone achieve these goals. A range of evidence-based options must be considered across the four food systems domains.



## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Agricultural policies need to support not only food security but a diversity of products entering the market and affordable prices for nutrient-rich foods. The right policies can encourage research on improving productivity and quality of nutrient-rich commodities, e.g. through biofortification, as well as policies that subsidise inputs and support extension services for production of nutritious foods. Policies focused on smallholders, especially women, can support the supply of a greater diversity of nutritious foods in households.



## MARKETS AND TRADE SYSTEMS

Public and private sector policies are critical to facilitating trade and marketing of commodities that contribute to a healthy diet. Supportive infrastructure policies improve the movement, storage and availability of more perishable, nutrient-rich foods. Policies that support quality enhancement, food safety and profitability of small and medium-sized enterprises can pay important dividends to consumers through low prices and enhanced food quality.



## CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER

Policies in the agricultural production domain that encourage production of healthy foods may also contribute to consumer purchasing power for rural populations which are particularly threatened by undernutrition. Specific policies, such as price ceilings or school feeding programmes, may subsidise nutritious foods for key target groups, including women and children.



## FOOD TRANSFORMATION AND CONSUMER DEMAND

Food fortification policies that add essential micronutrients to inexpensive, staple food have a positive effect on the food environment. Innovative consumer information policies can create demand and ensure that foods in the household are prepared for healthy diets, while food quality and safety standards can improve the accessibility of nutritious but safe foods.

# MOVING FORWARD

Food systems must ensure that people have access to affordable, nutritious foods at every stage of life. Food systems are changing, and so must the dialogue on policy and investments that influence them. The traditional ways of looking at agricultural productivity as the solution to food and nutrition security are no longer tenable. More food is needed, but our policies need to be more innovative to ensure that we improve diet quality in the process. Malnutrition is multi-faceted – policy actions must be wary of the potential for encouraging obesity while seeking to reduce undernutrition, and vice versa. We must better understand these connections and identify optimal ways to intervene to make each policy and each component of the food system more nutrition-friendly.

The Global Panel's objectives are to help generate and stimulate a stronger evidence base for how changes in agriculture and food systems can improve nutrition, and to use this knowledge to create a new understanding amongst decision-makers of the role and future potential of agriculture and food systems in achieving nutritional security. Engagement of a wide range of stakeholders is needed to encourage aligned efforts and synergy of actions that ultimately link the four main elements making up the food system, enhance the choices available within local food environments, and support consumer choices that result in high quality diets and nutrition for all.

This is a summary for policymakers of the Technical Brief **How can Agriculture and Food System Policies improve Nutrition?** released in November 2014 by the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition. Both reports can be found on the Global Panel website, [www.glopan.org](http://www.glopan.org), with more information on Global Panel members and activities.

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