



WORKING WITH POWER IN MULTI- STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES

Insights from the UNDP Co-Inquiry on
“How can we work more systemically
to accelerate progress towards a
more sustainable food system?”

United Nations Development Programme
2023



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**WORKING WITH POWER IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES
INSIGHTS FROM THE UNDP CO-INQUIRY ON WORKING MORE SYSTEMICALLY TO ACCELERATE
PROGRESS TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM**

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One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

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Lead author: Nicolas Petit (UNDP)
Co-author: Herman Brouwer (Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation), Henriette Friling (UNDP), Sophia Robele (UNDP)
Review comments from: Andrew Bovarnick, Charles O'Malley (UNDP)
Design and production: María Fernández del Moral (UNDP)

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INTRODUCTION

We cannot talk about system transformation without talking about power.

Power is complex, everywhere, dynamic and at play within every relationship. It is multidimensional, changing according to context, circumstances and interests. Its expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation. In any system, certain actors have privileged access and ability to shape how the system functions and how it produces outcomes. These actors will benefit more than others from resource flows in the system, creating a disincentive to change it.

Although changing power dynamics is key for system transformation, too many multi-stakeholder processes for food and agriculture transformation take a neutral stance towards power, making it challenging to fully acknowledge or address its consequences. More often than not, designers and facilitators of such processes lack the necessary awareness, skills, space and incentive structures to prioritize, discuss and act upon power dynamics, which is likely to significantly reduce the impact of change.

Food systems also have their own specificities when it comes to the channels by which power influences development outcomes.

Corporate concentration of power, opaque supply chains, green washing, resource grabs, depoliticized food system multi-stakeholder processes and the lack of appropriate food system governance mechanisms are some of the many examples through which power imbalances manifest in the food and agriculture sector. Therefore, who controls food and farming is a crucial question if we are to develop equitable, resilient, healthy,

inclusive and regenerative food systems.

Taking a more critical view towards power relations within global food systems, particularly around the dominant globalised, agro-industrial, commodity approach to agriculture; critically reflecting on the ways power shapes “multi-stakeholderism” for collective decision-making; and transforming governance structures to support new forms of citizen participation are some of the key leverage points to accelerate food system transformation.

As part of the 3rd cycle of the UNDP Co-inquiry on food systems transformation, between June and November 2022, we conducted four participatory dialogue sessions to identify key questions, challenges and potential solutions in relation to the following co-inquiry question:

“How can international development practitioners work more effectively with power in multi-stakeholder processes for food systems transformation?”

The objectives of the co-inquiry were to influence key individuals involved in programme implementation to consider more deeply how to work with power more effectively in their programme and country work and to come up with guidelines on working effectively with power.

This report is a summary of the key insights captured during these four sessions from collective sense-making. It also provides a number of tools shared by participants to understand and work more effectively with power.



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COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH



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A collaborative inquiry provides a space for stakeholders to inquire together into critical issues and questions they face, a type of peer to peer investigation. The co-inquiry methodology is particularly effective for:



Deeper learning and breakthrough insight:

Creating a safe space where participants can step back and reflect more deeply on key questions around the challenges and obstacles they are facing. The methodology makes it easier to see and acknowledge hard truths and blind spots and therefore creates the conditions in which breakthrough insights can be generated.



Building and strengthening relationships:

Creating a strong learning environment away from the pressures of 'doing' and transacting also has the effect of supporting deeper connections and building trust, from which a greater openness and willingness to collaborate can emerge.



Motivating stakeholder action:

Participants in a co-inquiry go through their own learning process, so it is particularly effective as a change methodology, because participants experience their own insights and 'aha moments' along the way so they don't need to then be persuaded to change or to act because they reach their own conclusions.



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UNDP CO-INQUIRY ON FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

UNDP CO-INQUIRY ON FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION



Photo: © UNDP Burkina Faso

Since 2020, the UNDP Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems (FACS) team has been facilitating a collaborative inquiry exploring how we can accelerate systemic change in global food and agricultural systems. Through different cycles and together with leading systems thinkers and practitioners the co-inquiry process has generated powerful individual and collective learning and insights.

Cycle 1

The first co-inquiry in 2020 convened 40 participants around the question “*how can we work more systemically to accelerate progress towards a more sustainable food system?*” The insights from Cycle 1 were synthesized into ten key points:

1.

Systemic approaches require more flexibility and room for adaptation.

2.

Systemic change is actively resisted in the field, as are systemic approaches.

3.

At the same time, there is an opening to strengthen field-wide capacity for systemic approaches to change.

4.

We can learn from current examples of small and large scale systemic approaches that work.

5.

There is still a need to provide further proof for the efficacy of systemic approaches.

6.

Greater inclusion of stakeholders from across the system strengthens systemic change but often doesn't happen for various reasons.

7.

Shared vision can be a strength or a hindrance.

8.

Shared mental models can be a strength or a hindrance.

9.

The sustainable development profession itself creates a limiting condition regarding systems change.

10.

Paying attention to a process that invites people to engage with heart, mind and soul.

The full report can be found here: [How can we work more systemically to accelerate progress toward a more sustainable food system? A Co-Inquiry Process.](#)

Cycle 2

A second cycle of the co-inquiry took place with 70 participants in 2021 around three sub-themes:



Systems change in practice:

“How can we apply systems change in practice in the field of food, agriculture and commodities? What do we identify as the enablers and scale factors from positive experiences of systems change?”



Systems leadership:

“How can we support the emergence of systems leadership in the field? How can we identify, engage and uplift change agents, local to global?”



Documenting systems change:

“How can we capture and share the results and impact of systems change approaches?”



Photo: © UNDP Benin

The insights from cycle 2 were synthesized into ten recommended steps to integrate systems thinking into international development programmes working on food and agricultural systems:

1. Programme design:

Use adaptive and participatory processes that are more effective in conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

2. Stakeholder participation:

Shift from telling to listening, using collaborative approaches to designing and implementing solutions.

3. Trust and relationships:

Focus on building stronger trust and relationships as the foundation of effective collaboration.

4. Hearts as well as minds:

Pay greater attention to the psychological and behavioural dimensions of change.

5. Politics, power and conflict:

Acknowledge and work with the realities of power, politics and conflicting perspectives.

6. Institutional change:

Identify and remove institutional barriers to systemic ways of working.

7. Systems leadership:

Identify, connect and build the leadership capacity of leaders and champions from across the system.

8. Learning:

Put deep learning at the heart of programmes to enable improved sense-making and adaptation.

9. Facilitation:

Build and strengthen local facilitation capacity to support effective collaborative action in the longer term.

10. Measurement:

Measure indicators and enablers of systemic change and engage stakeholders in participatory evaluation processes.

The full report can be found here: [Changing Food Systems: What Systems thinking means for designing and implementing development programmes to catalyze change in food and agricultural systems.](#)

Cycle 3

As part of the 3rd cycle of UNDP Co-inquiry on Food Systems transformation, we conducted between June and November 2022 four participatory dialogue sessions. These included a mix of small group discussions and reflections with the wider group to identify key questions, challenges and potential solutions in relation to the following co-inquiry question:

“How can international development practitioners work more effectively with power in multi-stakeholder processes for food systems transformation?”

The objectives of the co-inquiry were (i) to influence key individuals involved in programme implementation to consider more deeply how to work with power more effectively in their programme and country work and (ii) to come up with guidelines on working effectively with power in multi-stakeholder processes for the food and agriculture sector.

Nicolas Petit from the UNDP FACS team facilitated the four sessions with support from Henriette Frilling, Herman Brouwer from Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI) and Sophia Robele from UNDP SDG Integration team/Asia-Pacific Strategic Foresight Network kindly agreed to support the process as knowledge partners.

This report is a summary of the key insights captured during these four sessions from collective sense-making.



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**PARTICIPANTS’
INSIGHTS ON
WORKING MORE
EFFECTIVELY
WITH POWER**

PARTICIPANTS' INSIGHTS ON WORKING MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH POWER

During the first session, we asked participants the key questions they were holding in relation to the co-inquiry question on working more effectively with power in the context of multi-stakeholder processes.

Herman Brouwer from Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation and author of the [MSP guide](#) then presented some of his experience on working with power in multi-stakeholder processes and provided participants with some initial ideas and recommendations. For example, possible “strategies” to weave equity and inclusion into the fabric of multi-stakeholder processes include working with power on three levels: (i) Individual (ii) Managing group dynamics (iii) Structural design of MSPs. As these levels closely aligned with the key questions participants were holding, it was decided that they could serve as useful frames through which the group could further explore ways to address power in the subsequent three sessions.

Individual Awareness

- How do we ensure that inner work is part of the process of systems transforming work?
- How do we ensure that different stakeholders recognize the power they hold in relation to others in a system?

MSP Design issues

- How do we design multi-stakeholder processes taking into account power considerations?

Managing group dynamics

- What is the meaning and value of safe spaces? And how can we create them?
- What are the key mechanisms for reinstating or shifting power?
- How do we recognize, address and work with different power dynamics?
- How do we strengthen group capacity to work with power?
- How do we address the hidden/invisible power dynamics?

The second session considered in more detail the question of designing multi-stakeholder processes, the third session explored the theme of managing group dynamics, and the last session focused on applying these insights to the specificities of food systems and the ways that power plays out in different ways than other sectors. The question of individual awareness was explored as a cross-cutting issue across the different sessions.

Different participatory exercises were conducted during the sessions to gather insights on each thematic. For example, on individual awareness, we did a privilege/oppression exercise looking at the intersectional nature of multiple identities we hold in relation to different group settings and context.

On managing group dynamics, we used a guided meditation with eyes closed on what's at play when managing group/power dynamics during a typical workshop in our respective organisation and country. What do we see, what do we feel/notice using all our senses, how does power show up, how do we respond, what ideas do we bring, etc.

Each of these practices were usually followed by journaling/personal reflections, break out groups and plenary discussion.

The following sections of the report present for each of these three themes a table with “current practice” mentioned by co-inquiry participants as well as “what is needed” to work more effectively with power. These insights were informed by the diversity of experiences that co-inquiry participants brought from different organizational perspectives (e.g. UNDP, FAO, WWF, Conservation international, Southern Africa Food Lab, African Food Fellowship, Wageningen University, etc.) as well as from different global and country level experience (e.g. Costa Rica, Indonesia, South Africa, Liberia, Kenya, Philippines, etc.). See the full list of participants at the end of this report.





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**HOW CAN WE DESIGN
MULTISTAKEHOLDER
PROCESSES TAKING
INTO ACCOUNT POWER
CONSIDERATIONS?**

HOW CAN WE DESIGN MULTISTAKEHOLDER PROCESSES TAKING INTO ACCOUNT POWER CONSIDERATIONS?

Recognising and addressing our blindspots in designing the process

Current Practice

Lack of awareness, skills, space and priority to discuss power dynamics.

Making assumptions (stereotypes, homogenous stakeholders, equal voice, resource and knowledge)

MSPs are often started and managed from the global north and “expertise” located within a particular race/class

Designers/organisers of MSPs are bypassing important steps due to “urgency”. Push for effective rather than inclusive processes

Power as an afterthought. Not investing enough time in understanding power dynamics

Lack of shared understanding of meaningful participation

Difficulties in incorporating alternative viewpoints

Organisers holding the power with predetermined agenda, goals, decision-making rules, and problem and solution definition

Some stakeholders are considered more worthy of being listened to than others

What is needed

Developing “power literacy” by building up knowledge, reflexivity and interpretation skills to gain a more holistic understanding of the power dynamics and forms of power that comes up

Avoiding treating stakeholders as homogenous groups based on limited identity markers, and recognize the ways we might be perpetuating stereotypes

Conducting power checks at different stage of the multi-stakeholder process as a way to practice power literacy to help recognize power, name power, understand its impact and act accordingly

Being open about our own, or our institutional, blindspots and power differentials, even if they can’t be changed immediately

Bringing our whole self to the process, beyond our institutional role (e.g., making space to connect with stakeholders on a more personal level when feasible, in order to draw out each others’ value beyond job titles or formal expertise)

Make power more visible through consistent questioning: For some this means reflecting on ways we may have been subordinated and to find power “within”; For others it could mean reflecting on their own privilege and socio-cultural biases

Creating spaces to discuss key reflection questions such as (i) how do we and those we work with actually experience different kinds of power, powerlessness or empowerment in our lives and work? (ii) how do we respond to, resist or transform the forms of power that constrain us? Or (iii) how do we find and mobilise the forms of power that enable and empower us?

More actors to drive the process during the different stages of the multi-stakeholder process, including setting the agenda, goals, problem and solution definition. More representation in interpreting data and results

Commitment from leadership to invest in the time needed for understanding and shifting power dynamics

The set-up: making the process more accessible



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Current Practice

Process often held in official languages (e.g. English, Spanish, French) and interpretation not always available

Abstract and complex language being used

Formal settings, following the same hierarchies as outside of the process

Fancy venues, sometimes with additional costs attached to attending

Virtual attendance not accessible for all

The set-up of the physical meeting space: Participants being conscious of where they sit in a meeting room because of hierarchies/what's expected of who sits where

Mobility is frequently a barrier in terms of access to resources and social norms permitting travel

What is needed

Conducting the meetings in local language (or at a minimum ensuring interpretation is available)

Providing friendly and culturally appropriate explanations for technical terms

Appropriate formalities such as interrogating the traditional formalities and protocols, and their potential negative consequences on participants' sense of safety and openness, perceived ability to share freely or relationship to others in the room

Structure the room (e.g. chairs in a circle) in ways that encourage different modes of conversation and open dialogue

Accessible venue: beyond physical considerations, it includes support to participants when needed (e.g., culturally appropriate accommodations for childcare, making the meeting space safe and secure, providing financial support to travel safely and in a culturally appropriate way)

Implementing self-monitoring and regular reflection moments to make sure that people are being meaningfully included, in ways that they themselves consider meaningful

Who is sitting at the table?

Current Practice

Farmers, women, youth, local communities, and marginalized groups, including racially or ethnically minoritized groups, often have less representation in the room

One farmer representing the voice of all farmers

Organiser may believe that their processes foster equity simply by inviting more under-represented actors to the table (while power dynamics are not discussed/addressed)

A few 'loud' people taking over the discussion

Cultural differences determining how people act

(Limited) Participation may be used to legitimize outcomes or agreements

Many challenges faced by under-represented actors for participation in multi-stakeholder processes are not well understood/acknowledged by organiser of the process (social norms, gender roles, restrictions on mobility, low literacy and education levels, low confidence, rights not recognized, cultural differences, etc.)

Actors may also face a real power dilemma in terms of whether to join a MSP or not. If it is designed in a very limited way – is it worth going there and try to make the best of it? Or is there a point where you need to boycott or back out of MSPs that merely seem to reconfirm business-as-usual, and don't have a transformational agenda or ambition? Can you exert more influence on an issue by being part of an MSP or by being outside of it?

What is needed

Assess the enabling environment and context conditions that motivate or hinder inclusion; Identify strategies for change and monitor progress by using appropriate tools fostering inclusion (see for example the [tools](#) proposed in the guide to improve inclusion in multistakeholder forums)

Work with well-trained equity-sensitive facilitators. Skilled facilitation is key to ensuring that all voices are heard and that there is an open dialogue between different stakeholders

Invest in capacity building for both rights holders and duty bearers (see definition in glossary) in leadership to build rights awareness as well as the presentation, speaking, communication or organisation skills of stakeholders experiencing exclusion as a result of these factors. At the same time, work to dismantle institutional or normative barriers to their equitable participation in a given context. Such capacity building enhances knowledge and confidence and contribute to empowerment. See for example success factors for organizing for inclusion of women and indigenous groups, improving influence, enhancing capacities or strengthening collective action [here](#)

Acknowledging and working to address any potential cultural and religious barriers to mutual understanding

Provide adequate representation among the speakers, panels, experts and moderators, giving consideration to range of identities including race, gender, age, neurodivergence, etc.

Supporting/strengthening under-represented organisations, networks, groups also promotes empowerment and inclusion in decision making

Identify and monitor markers of success that relate to power awareness, equity and inclusion at all stages of the processes

In addition to the insights shared by co-inquiry participants, Sophia Robele introduced during the 2nd session the concept of *Power Literacy* developed by Maya Goodwill¹ and its relevance for the design of multi-stakeholder processes.

¹ Beyond Good Intentions: Towards a Power Literacy Framework for Service Designers. Goodwill, M., Bendor R., & Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, M. 2021.

In particular, the table below presents a number of questions allowing practitioners designing, facilitating or implementing multi-stakeholder processes for food systems transformation to build power awareness in their work according to five different forms of power present in multi-stakeholder processes. While the framework has been developed for social designers, its relevance extends beyond practitioners or facilitators who explicitly consider themselves “designers.” Its considerations could apply to the design of any multistakeholder process holding specific intentions, particularly where there are efforts to yield certain outcomes based on choices regarding the format, dialogue approaches and facilitation methods involved.

■ Forms of power □ Reflexivity questions for power literacy

Privilege – ability to influence a design process due to an unearned advantage based on their social position or identity

- What privilege do you have and how does it differ from those you are working with?
- What privilege (or oppression) have you experienced based on the groups that you were born into and other aspects of your identity?
- What advantages do you experience in your daily life due to your privilege? What biases do you have as a result?
- How does this affect your relationship with the community of stakeholders that you are designing for/ within this project?
- What unearned advantages will those with privilege experience in the design project?
- Who may be unintentionally excluded or marginalized as a result?

Access power – ability to influence who is included and who is excluded from a service design project

- Who is included and who is excluded in the design project?
- Which stakeholders are represented in the design project? Which are not?
- How are the different stakeholders invited to participate?
- Will each stakeholder have the same kind of access throughout the design process, or will it change?
- How much influence do you have in determining access?
- What are the reasons for inclusion/exclusion?

Goal power – ability of designers to initiate, frame and structure the design project, and the way problems and goals are defined and chosen

- Who initiated this project and what problems, desired outcomes, and processes have already been decided?
- How has the problem been defined or framed?
- What are the goals or desired outcomes?
- How much influence did you have on the structure of the project and the design process?
- How might framing and goals for this project affect participation?
- What and who may be left out as a result?
- What alternatives might be selected if more marginal stakeholders are given goal power?

Role Power – ability to influence the roles that different actors will assume during a design project

- What are the different roles, relationships, and hierarchies between those who are involved?
- How does participation differ for each stakeholder?
- What different roles are being given to stakeholders (eg. Participant, team member, expert, researcher, decision-maker, non-participant) and who is deciding on this?
- Which actors have reciprocal vs. hierarchical relations in the design project as a result?
- Where on the participation spectrum do these assigned roles put stakeholders who have lived experience of the social issue being addressed?
- Which actors will have the ability to interpret and/or prioritize findings?
- Do these roles challenge status quo inequities found outside of the design project, or reproduce them?
- What negatives and positives might come from these assigned roles?
- What effect, good or bad, might these roles have on stakeholders with lived experience outside of the design project? what about those with oppressed identities?

Rule Power – the ability to establish the way that actors included in the design network will work together

- How do we work together?
- What rules, norms, and beliefs are guiding the way we work together and make decisions?
- What kind of language is being used?
- Where and when are participatory sessions? How long will they be and what information will be included in them?
- What ways of knowing and doing are seen as most valid?
- How are actors expected to communicate and interact during the design process?
- Who set these rules, norms, and/or immutable beliefs in the context of the design project?
- How is privilege affecting rule power?
- How might these rules, norms, and beliefs amplify certain voices? How might they silence others?
- How might rule power affect relationships between stakeholders?
- What ways of knowing, communicating, and doing are left out? How might this affect outcomes?

Table 1: The power literacy framework (adapted from Beyond Good Intentions: Towards a Power Literacy Framework for Service Designers – Goodwill, M., Bendor R., & Van Der Bijl-Brouwer, M. 2021)



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MANAGING GROUP DYNAMICS

MANAGING GROUP DYNAMICS

How can we create safe spaces?



Photo: © UNDP RDC

Current Practice

Conversations focused on technical content

Formal, hierarchical and institutional roles

Conversations pushing for consensus, convergence and shared vision

Predatory behaviour from power holders

Discussion are usually focused on differences

Institutions prioritizing a limiting definition of “efficiency” at the expense of relationships and trust

Institutions not set up to prioritise building safe spaces, because what we measure in the end is having quick and efficient outcome or insights reports, regardless of how they were created/whose voices are represented in them

What is needed

Have a clear intention to bring all voices into the space. Facilitators play a key role in holding that intention – creating a safe space starts with design aspects

Understand what “safe” means for the different participants not only the facilitator’s perspective. Consider/be sensitive to context and cultural practices. For example the barriers for participation in multistakeholder processes for marginalized groups are likely to differ greatly in different countries when it comes to social norms, gender roles, literacy levels, confidence level, travel and access, rights being recognized, enforced or known and so on

Setting the right tone from the start with sufficient time allocated in the agenda for connection, building trust and relationships between participants and not jumping straight into the transactional so that participants directly feel included and engaged

Use inclusive facilitation tools to ensure all voices are heard. For example, [liberating structures](#) offers a [menu](#) of 33 practical methods providing an alternative way to help people to work together. Liberating structures replace or complement conventional meeting routines, and are designed to include everyone in shaping the next step, enhance relational coordination and trust. Each method is simple and easy to learn and can be used by everyone at every level from the executive suite to the grassroots.

Bringing our whole self beyond our institutional role. Finding ways to support human connection and relationship building that transcends the roles and organisations. This can be achieved by using tools such as check-ins, storytelling, paired walks, generative listening, some of which are shared in [this UNDP toolkit](#)

Being open about our own blind spots: vulnerability can be a superpower when we speak from the heart. It encourages being honest with ourselves and others - which is the place from which transformation can happen

Use the power of story telling – spaces open to the lived experience of all participants – to connect with people’s histories

Create space for divergence and not only look for consensus. The expression of disagreement may be necessary to listen to a plurality of voices

Use wider framing and context setting that emphasise what we have in common and agree with, not just our differences

Create powerful questions in a language that is understandable by everyone

How can we strengthen group capacity to work with power?

Current Practice

Power is not discussed or analysed

Lack of awareness, skills, space and priority to discuss power dynamics

There are no capacity building activities on working with power included in the design and implementation of multi-stakeholder processes

Capacity building activities usually focused on technical solutions related to food systems transformation

Lack of reflective spaces created to address hard truths and blind spots

Stakeholders are not provided with the tools to jointly explore different forms of power, and what to do about it

Stakeholders do not feel confident and safe to voice power imbalances



Photo: © UNDP Benin

What is needed

To name it, to be aware of it, talk about it, why it is important for system transformation: people need to know why power is an issue to begin with/to have an interest in strengthening their capacity

Create a habit and rhythm to ask questions related to power and privilege consistently. Recognise that these questions may slow down the process, and confront our own resistance to do this, being mindful of why others are resistant

Improve skills and awareness through capacity building, tools, experiential learning, etc.

Capacity building on power isn't always explicitly about power – it can also be about foundational matters such as relationship building, deep listening, compassion, empathy

Disaggregated analysis and time to assess power – determine where power sits

Providing examples and case studies of how power has successfully shifted in previous MSPs, including lessons that can be gleaned from different sectors and contexts

Ensure all voices are heard through specific facilitation tools and processes recognising the value of different perspectives

Ensure facilitator of the process is equipped with the right tools and processes

Careful facilitation and design of the session – preparation is key so that one can be 'optimally unprepared'

Make the difficult conversations more "fun" and "playful," for example, through the use of role play

Target specific groups with specific awareness raising activities (e.g. engage the partners with higher power in discussions on change and equity, support in advance those with less power so they can participate more effectively in MSP, etc.)



**WHAT ARE THE
KEY MECHANISMS
FOR SHIFTING
POWER DYNAMICS
TO TRANSFORM
FOOD SYSTEMS?**

WHAT ARE THE KEY MECHANISMS FOR SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS TO TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS?



Photo: © UNDP Peru

For the last session of the co-inquiry, we explored in more depth how power plays in the specific domain of food systems - which may be different than in other sectors. The goal was to question the dominant frame and explore the elephants in the room we might not be acknowledging.

In order to take the discussion beyond business as usual suggestions and provide concrete examples on actions to be taken, we used a recent report from the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) looking into how power can be shifted from a civil society standpoint : [A Long Food Movement: Transforming Food Systems by 2045](#).

This report was selected as it provides an analysis of food systems transformation that is power-sensitive, giving useful language for discussion.

After presenting the different future scenarios and pathways highlighted in the report, the participants were asked to reflect on what actions can be taken to shift power dynamics for the transformation of food systems. This was done first through individual reflections, followed by break out groups and plenary discussions.

Current Practice

Power is highly concentrated in the hand of mega-corporations

Land, ocean and resource grabs

Opaque supply chains

Confusing array of sustainability claims

Lack of appropriate governance mechanisms that allow for a better distribution of power amongst different actors

MSPs are often “depoliticized”

We are exclusively anthropocentric - we don’t consider the right to life of other species; we don’t consider the intrinsic value of ecosystems - who represents the worms, the insects, the birds, etc?

Organisations are often not well structured to collaborate and funding is hard to come by for collaboration with bigger purpose: transforming food systems

Where are the politics and power in the food system the “control” elements/ the pieces that will resist change are often not well understood by policymakers

Civil society challenges the agenda but cannot change the course

What is needed

UN institutions need to take a more critical view of power relations within global food systems, and the historical or colonial legacies that influenced them – particularly around the dominant globalized, agro-industrial, commodity approach to agriculture

To pave the way for any reform of UN agrifood agencies, we also need to question what drives decision-making in the broader donor architecture – challenging the existing development paradigm

Shifting power dynamics requires taking a more systemic view of food systems – taking a multidisciplinary approach rather than seeing food systems in reductionist terms

Challenge and critically reflect on ‘multistakeholderism’ to see if we are unwillingly contributing to perpetuate unequitable power relationships by assuming that MSPs are power-neutral

Transforming governance structures such as food policy councils, grassroot and deliberative dialogue and supporting new forms of citizen participation and other mechanisms to strengthen participation of marginalized groups in food system governance

Making power visible where it currently is not visible or hidden, by regulation such as true-cost accounting, commodity chain transparency. Sophisticated public data tools/ transparency app to distinguish A-B and C corps. This may change the narrative about our food futures

Bring the issue of power dynamics to the forefront of programme/project development. For example by making power analysis a default part of situation- and stakeholder analysis done pre-project, or at the start of projects, and invest in sense-making processes to continue ask ourselves the question whether we are doing the right thing

Shifting financial flows. Use tax/subsidies more deliberately to promote healthy/fair/sustainable food options – don’t leave this to the market only

Rooting food systems in diversity, agroecology and human rights

Strengthen successful collaborative processes and participatory dialogues by making them more inclusive and equitable

Develop new laws and regulations defending nature rights and human rights, to monitor and regulate technologies that might be dangerous to them



Photo: © UNDP Burkina Faso



Photo: © UNDP Chad

GLOSSARY

**LIST OF
PARTICIPANTS**

TOOLS

**BACKGROUND
READING**

GLOSSARY

Language and the way that it is used is important especially when considering power. This list of terms, which provided a basis for shared language during the co-inquiry, is taken from the field guide to power literacy - <https://www.power-literacy.com/field-guide> and CIFOR's guide to improve inclusion in multi-stakeholder forums <https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/7973/>

Democracy:	The idea that everyone should have an equal say in making the decisions that impact them.
Design:	The intention and the unintentional impact behind an outcome. Everyone designs, but only certain people are paid to do it.
Inclusion:	Process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights. In the context of multi-stakeholder processes, inclusion means ensuring that no institutional framework, cultural norms or forms of identity unfairly influence decision-making processes nor exclude people from engaging actively in any decision that affects them.
Marginalised:	A group or category of people made to be less important or of lower status, typically with less decision-making ability and influence.
Multi-stakeholder forum:	Is a purposefully organised interactive process that brings together a range of stakeholders to participate in dialogue and/or decision making and/or implementation of actions seeking to address a problem they hold in common or to achieve a goal for their common benefits.
Oppression:	The systematic and pervasive inequality embedded within social institutions, interpersonal interactions and individual consciousness. It can be understood as the inverse of privilege, or the 'isms' (racism, ableism, sexism, classism, etc.).
Participatory Design:	The involvement of various stakeholders in the design process. Participation exists along a spectrum.
Power:	An actor's ability to influence an outcome. This is affected by asymmetry in relationships. Power can be used both positively and negatively.

Power literacy:	The ability to practice self-awareness of, be sensitive to and understand the impact of power in order to align outcomes to intention.
Privilege:	A social relation where one social group benefits at the expense of another. It is an unearned advantage and is often invisible to those who have it.
Reflexivity:	An actor's awareness of power and the corresponding social structures internalized by themselves and others around them.
Rights-based approach:	Principle that all individuals are born with rights to dignity, freedom, equality, security and decent standard of living. These human rights are universal, they cannot be taken away, and they do not have to be bought, earned or inherited. A rights-based approach put people and under-represented groups at the center of development efforts, positioning them as active agents in processes affecting their lives. In doing so, rights-based approach rearrange the roles of states from development partners to accountable and transparent duty-bearers, and of citizens from passive beneficiaries to empowered rights-holders.
Rights-holders and duty-bearers:	Have responsibilities for supporting and promoting the fulfillment of their rights and the rights of others in a rights-based approach. Rights-holders need to work to promote, defend and fulfill their claims to rights and freedoms. Duty-bearers are those individuals, groups and organizations responsible for upholding and enabling the realization of rights; they have an obligation to fulfill, protect and respect the rights of others. All human beings are rights-holders, and people can be both rights-holders and duty-bearers, depending on the context, issues and relationships at play.
Social Justice:	Equitable treatment, opportunities, rights and distribution of resources within and between all communities and social groups in a dignified and respectful way.
Stakeholder:	An individual, social group or organisation that will be impacted in some way by the design project, process and/or its outcomes. The impact might be large, small, positive or negative.
Under-represented groups:	include sub-groups that historically have not had equitable influence in decision-making in a specific context, These may include women, indigenous peoples, the poor, the elderly, young people, Afro-descendants, pastoralists, LGBTI people, people with disabilities, lower-caste peoples, religious minorities and others. It is important to recognize that there are different degrees of under-representation ranging from outright exclusion to token representation.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this Co-inquiry cycle on working with power were:

Danielle Jean Pierre	ALIARSE	Charles Nyandiga	UNDP
Emanuelle Cheyns	CIRAD	Goetz Schroth	UNDP
George Ilebo	Conservation International Liberia	Tomas Sales	UNDP
Siobhan Kelly	FAO	Andrea Bina	UNDP
Pablo Garcia	FAO	Alexandra Postrigan	UNDP
Patrick Kalas	FAO	Maria Soledad Riestra	UNDP
Ahmad Mukhtar	FAO	Marlon Flores	UNDP
Karen Munoko	FARA Africa	Madeline Craig	UNDP
Jen Marshall	FCDO	Jairo Serna	UNDP
Wida Septiana	Food Bank Indonesia	Sandra Andraka	UNDP
Sarah Queblatin	Green Relief Initiative	Sophia Robele	UNDP
Yanti Triwadiantini	Partnership-ID	Usman Iftikhar	UNDP
Devi Dine Chandra	SECO Indonesia	Herman Brouwer	Wageningen University
Assumpta Uzamukunda	The African Food Fellowship	Tamara Metze	Wageningen University
Busiso Moyo	The Southern Africa Food Lab	Eunice Likoko	Wageningen University
Andrew Bovarnick	UNDP	Brenda Namugumya	Wageningen University
Nicolas Petit	UNDP	Alex Rees	Wasafiri consulting
Henriette Friling	UNDP	Aditya Bayunanda	WWF Indonesia
Charlie O'Malley	UNDP		



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TOOLS

Example of tools for working more effectively with power in the context of multi-stakeholder processes shared by participants during the co-inquiry.

- The Power Cube - <https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/powerpack-web-version-2011.pdf>
- Liberating Structures - <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/>
- The MSP Tool Guide - <https://mspguideorg.files.wordpress.com/2021/12/msp-tool-guide-wur-wcdi.pdf>
- Power Literacy - <https://www.power-literacy.com/>
- Power Play - <https://medium.com/@lauren.s.weinstein/shifting-the-powerplay-in-co-design-b8ba84363dd0>
- Equity meets design - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fR_MokFnaEojv7JUNUAL43bRShngRTI1p1mfhjVfawl/edit
- The Power Awareness Tool: Analysing power in partnerships for development. <https://www.partos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Power-Awareness-Tool.pdf>

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