



POWER MAPPING TOOL

Methodology & Guidance Note

Food & Power Initiative

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This guidance note was prepared under the framework of the Food & Power Initiative (FPI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Food and Power Initiative brings together diverse actors from civil society, academia, UN agencies, international coalitions, governments and philanthropy. They are united in the collectively developed FPI mission to identify, highlight, address and challenge power asymmetries in food systems, to support the realization of the right to food, greater equity and ecological integrity. The Food & Power Initiative, and the development of this guidance note, were made possible through the generous financial support of the Federal Office for Agriculture of Switzerland and the McKnight Foundation. Their commitment to addressing structural inequities in food systems and fostering inclusive governance has been essential to advancing this work.

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Citation:

United Nations Development Programme (2026). Country-Level Power Mapping and Analysis: Methodology and Guidance Note. UNDP: Food and Power Initiative.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Rationale

Power relations shape every aspect of food systems—from who decides policy and allocates resources to whose voices are heard and who benefits from innovation. Transforming food systems therefore requires more than technical solutions; it demands a clear understanding of the underlying power dynamics that determine access to resources, influence decision-making and perpetuate inequities. The Food & Power Initiative (FPI), led by UNDP, has developed a Power Mapping Methodology to help country teams uncover and address these dynamics in order to accelerate inclusive, resilient and sustainable food-system transformation.

Purpose and Audience of the Guide

This guidance note offers a structured, practical process for analysing power in food systems and translating insights into actionable strategies. It is intended primarily for UNDP teams, national government counterparts and partners engaged in work related to power, political economy and policy reform in food systems. Donors and other development agencies can use it to inform grant-making and investment strategies, while elements of the methodology may also support grassroots organisations participating in policy dialogues. The guide assumes that users have a mandate to influence national or sub-national policies or programmes; it is not designed as a stand-alone tool for community organising.

Overview of the Four-Step Process

1. **Preparation & Scoping** – Define why the power analysis is needed, what part of the food system it will focus on, and who commissions and owns the exercise. Assemble a diverse team with political-economy, facilitation and inclusion expertise. Conduct desk research to compile baseline data on food security, poverty and environmental impacts, identify initial stakeholders and agree on a shared conceptual framework grounded in human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. **Stakeholder Identification & Network Mapping** – Build a comprehensive inventory of actors across government, civil society, the private sector and international organisations. Characterise each stakeholder's interests and influence using a mapping matrix, then visualise relationships through a power-interest grid, network diagram or concentric circles. Trace financial flows along the value chain to identify financial asymmetries and follow the money.
3. **Power Analysis** – Use the stakeholder data to analyse how power is exercised. Examine sources and forms of power (visible, hidden, invisible and systemic), levels (local, national, global) and spaces (closed, invited, claimed). Identify power asymmetries, such as market concentration, policy capture, unequal access to resources or financial exclusion, and map the likely resistance of incumbents. Summarise findings in a matrix or narrative that highlights leverage points for change.
4. **Strategy Development & Integration** – Translate insights into interventions that rebalance power. Design programmes that build the agency of marginalised groups (e.g. support producer organisations, leadership training, legal empowerment), foster alliances and coalitions, and advocate for policy reforms. Prioritise catalytic strategies—such as inclusive governance mechanisms, transparency initiatives and support for independent media—that can generate ripple effects across the system. Develop monitoring indicators and plan for adaptive management, recognising that power dynamics evolve over time.

Expected Outputs and Tools

By following this process, teams should produce:

- A concept note defining purpose, scope, team roles and workplan.
- A stakeholder mapping matrix and visual diagrams (e.g., power-interest grid, network map) outlining actors, relationships and influence.
- A power analysis report summarising power asymmetries, resistance mapping and potential leverage points, including a financial-flow analysis.
- A strategy and action plan linking each power issue to specific interventions, responsible actors and indicators for monitoring progress.

Editable templates for the matrix, mapping diagrams and action plan are provided in the annexes.

Cross-Cutting Elements and Normative Anchors

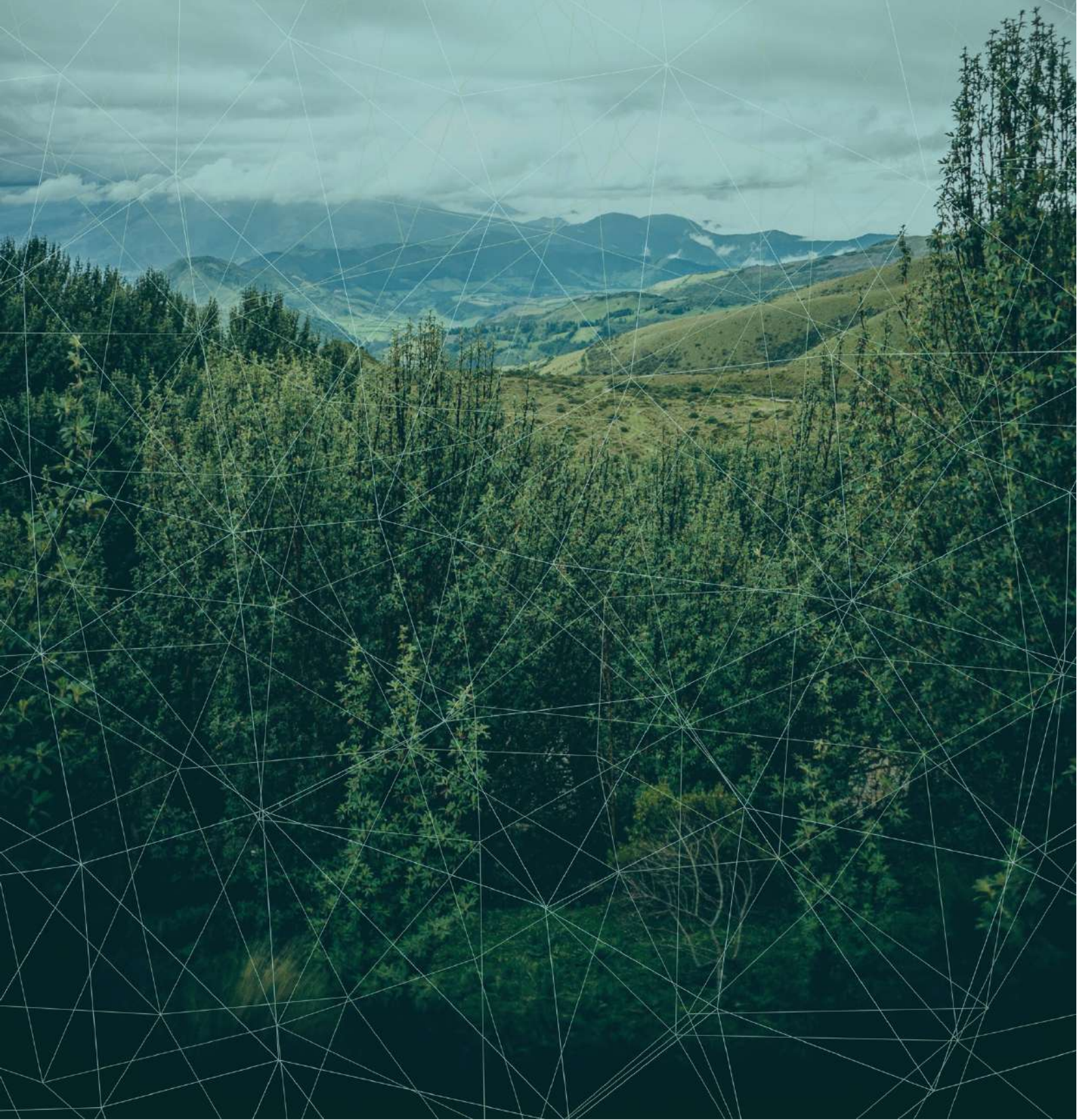
The methodology is grounded in universal human rights, gender equality and the SDGs. Users should explicitly agree upon these values at the outset and ensure that the analysis examines how power imbalances affect marginalised groups and the environment. The process aligns with systems-approach practices and encourages participation and ownership by engaging stakeholders throughout and validating findings with a broad group, while recognising the need for confidentiality and risk management in sensitive contexts.

Implementation Considerations

A full power mapping exercise typically spans several months, depending on scope, and requires resources for staff or consultant time, workshops, travel and data collection. Team members should include ideally experts in political economy and facilitation, as well as members with technical knowledge of the thematic area analysed. To generate demand and secure legitimacy, linking the power analysis to existing policy processes and communicate its benefits to decisionmakers is crucial. In sensitive contexts, the use of neutral facilitators, confidential data collection methods and protective measures for participant will be key.

The power mapping methodology is a living tool. Country teams are encouraged to adapt it to local contexts, update their analyses as conditions change, and share lessons learned to strengthen collective capacity to confront power asymmetries in food systems.

1. INTRODUCTION



Transforming food systems requires confronting the power dynamics that shape who makes decisions and who benefits. The UNDP-led *Food & Power Initiative* (FPI) was created to help countries identify and navigate these dynamics. Power asymmetries—whether between nations, corporations, small producers or communities—determine access to resources and influence outcomes. Thus, addressing power imbalances is essential to drive equitable food systems transformation.

As part of the Food and Power Initiative (FPI), country-level work will support governments and other stakeholders to better understand and navigate the power dynamics that shape food systems, and to use that understanding to accelerate more inclusive, resilient and sustainable transformation pathways. Power analysis and power mapping will be a core component of these country projects. This Guidance Note responds directly to that need: it provides a structured, practical approach for identifying how power operates in food systems, how it influences decision-making and resource allocation, and where entry points for more equitable change may lie.

This Power Analysis and Mapping Guide brings together a range of existing, well-established approaches developed by UN agencies, research institutes, civil society organizations, and facilitation practitioners, and organizes them into a coherent, practical process for use in country-level food systems work. The purpose is to help teams identify, interpret and navigate the power dynamics that shape food-system transformation using methods that are already tested, accessible and grounded in political economy analysis, systems thinking, and participatory governance.

The guide also builds on insights from UNDP's own Working with Power in Multi-Stakeholder Processes co-inquiry, a global peer-learning effort that engaged practitioners from development agencies, governments, NGOs, academia and the private sector. Through a series of facilitated collaborative inquiry sessions, participants explored how power, politics and conflict influence food and agriculture programmes. The co-inquiry generated practical learning on issues such as who participates in decision-making spaces, how agendas are shaped, how group dynamics can be managed, and what mechanisms can help address unequal influence.

Drawing on these experiences and on a broad ecosystem of political economy and participatory tools, this guide provides a structured approach, process steps, and a curated set of methods that practitioners can use to conduct power analysis and mapping in food systems. It is designed to help country teams move from implicit awareness of power dynamics to explicit, systematic and actionable analysis that can inform strategy, dialogue and implementation.

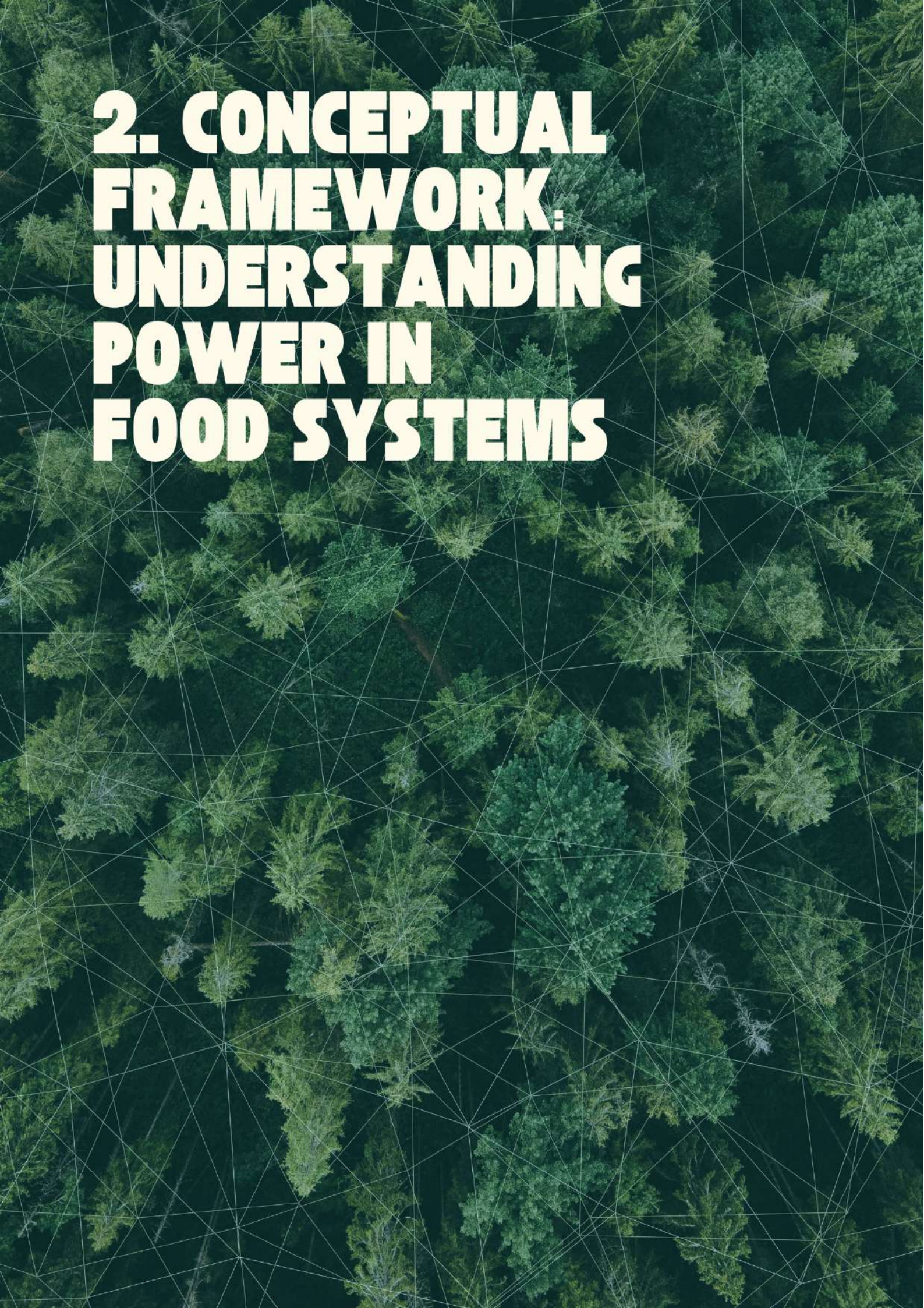
It is important to recognize that power mapping is not a value-neutral exercise. It is grounded in the principles of universal human rights and in the commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals to “leave no one behind.” In practical terms, this means examining who has access to land, finance, markets and decision-making spaces; whose knowledge counts in shaping policies; and which groups systematically bear the environmental, social or economic costs of current food system structures. Power analysis seeks to identify where these inequalities are embedded in institutions, incentives and narratives, and how they constrain the realization of rights such as the right to food, decent livelihoods, gender equality and a healthy environment.

The ultimate purpose of power mapping is therefore not simply to describe influence, but to inform strategies that rebalance it—so that small-scale producers, women, Indigenous Peoples, youth or other marginalized actors can participate meaningfully in shaping food systems transitions. Teams are encouraged to make explicit the normative framework guiding their analysis—whether rooted in human rights law, the SDGs, national constitutional commitments or other agreed standards. Clarifying this normative lens at the outset ensures that participants share a common understanding of what constitutes an unjust power asymmetry and what kind of transformation the analysis is intended to support.

Who is this guide for?

This guidance note is designed primarily for UNDP country teams and their national government counterparts who are working to transform food systems. It provides a structured process and practical tools to help these teams diagnose how power operates within a country's food system and to inform the design of programmes and policies that address inequities.

Secondary audiences include donors and other development agencies that wish to integrate a power-sensitive lens into their grant-making or investment strategies. While grassroots organisations may find certain tools (such as stakeholder mapping) useful, the methodology is intended to inform national-level strategies rather than to replace community-led power analyses. When grassroots groups engage in policy dialogue, elements of the guide can support coalition-building and advocacy.

An aerial photograph of a dense forest of evergreen trees, viewed from above. A white, intricate geometric network of lines is overlaid on the entire image, creating a complex web of triangles and polygons that connects various points across the forest canopy. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING POWER IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Power and Power Asymmetries: In this context, *power* refers to the ability of individuals, groups and institutions to influence decisions, access resources, and shape outcomes in the food system, shape how people think, frame problems and propose solutions, and influence collective norms and values.

Power can be exercised overtly through laws and policies, or subtly via control of narratives and institutions. Many food systems challenges persist due to **power asymmetries**—imbalances that favour certain actors over others. Recognizing these asymmetries is the first step to challenging them. As part of the exploratory analysis on Food & Power, UNDP prepared the background note *“Power Imbalances in Food Systems: A Framework for Analysis”*. This report identifies nine major power asymmetries that shape global and national food systems. These can be grouped into three broad domains:

1. Corporate concentration,
2. Inequitable access to key resources, and
3. Asymmetries in governance and policymaking.

Together, these nine asymmetries provide a diagnostic map of the structural and political obstacles to equitable food system transformation. They illustrate why technical solutions alone cannot shift systems, and why transformation requires confronting the visible, hidden, and invisible forms of power that shape food system outcomes.

Power Asymmetries in Food Systems: A Framework

A. Corporate Concentration Across Food System Value Chains

1. Concentration in Agricultural Inputs

The UNDP background report notes that agricultural production and markets for seeds, agrochemicals, and fertilizers are characterized by a high degree of consolidation, with a small number of global firms accounting for the majority of sales and R&D investment. This concentration shapes technology pathways, influences input pricing, and affects the availability of diverse production models. Regulatory frameworks, intellectual property rules, and extension services tend to reinforce standardized input packages, making it more difficult for small-scale producers to access alternative seeds or advisory support.

2. Concentration in Food Processing and Manufacturing

Processing and manufacturing—especially in the ultra-processed food (UPF) segment—are dominated by large multinational companies with substantial marketing capabilities and established distribution networks. Their scale enables cost advantages and strong brand recognition, which in turn influence consumer choices and retail shelf space. The report highlights that these firms often participate actively in lobbying, policy consultations and technical committees, which can shape regulatory approaches on labelling, nutrient profiling, advertising, and food safety standards.

3. Concentration in Food Retail, Supermarkets, and Digital Platforms

Supermarket chains, international fast-food companies and fast-growing e-commerce platforms play a central role in structuring food availability, pricing, and sourcing arrangements. Their bargaining power in procurement can set stringent quality, volume, and compliance requirements that many smaller producers struggle to meet. The UNDP report notes that this concentration can lead to a narrowing of market opportunities for informal traders and territorial food systems, and may increase dependence on centralized logistics and distribution channels.

B. Inequitable Access to Resources

4. Unequal Access to Land, Territories, and Natural Resources

Access to land and natural resources remains uneven in many countries due to historic land tenure patterns, market pressures, and inconsistent implementation of land governance frameworks. Groups such as women, youth, pastoralists, and Indigenous communities often face barriers in securing formal tenure or recognition of customary rights. These disparities affect the ability to invest, adapt to climate risks, and participate effectively in value chains. The UNDP report also highlights emerging pressures from large-scale acquisitions, infrastructure projects, and environmental regulations that can disproportionately affect communities with weaker negotiating power.

5. Unequal Access to Finance and Capital

Credit, insurance, and investment flows are distributed unevenly across food system actors. Large farms and agribusinesses often have preferential access to formal finance due to collateral, credit histories, or established relationships with lenders, while small-scale producers may rely on informal financing at higher costs. Public subsidies and guarantee schemes frequently channel support toward capital-intensive or export-oriented production. This allocation pattern can limit diversification, reduce resilience, and reinforce structural inequalities within rural economies.

6. Unequal Access to Knowledge, Technology, and Data

Agricultural knowledge and innovation systems often privilege formal research institutions, proprietary technologies, and digital platforms developed by large actors. This can result in limited support for farmer-led experimentation, Indigenous knowledge, and agroecological approaches. In addition, unequal access to digital technology and infrastructure—such as connectivity, geospatial data, or decision-support tools—can widen capability gaps between different groups of producers. Also, data governance and intellectual property arrangements often influence whose information is protected, who benefits from data value, and who can participate in innovation processes in favor of larger actors.

C. Governance and Policy Power Asymmetries

7. Asymmetries in Global Trade, Standards, and Geopolitics

Global trade agreements, investment treaties, and standards-setting bodies operate within geopolitical landscapes where negotiating capacity and agenda-setting power vary significantly across stakeholder groups and countries. High compliance costs for sanitary, phytosanitary, or quality standards can affect exporters differently, often favouring actors with greater resources, while limiting diversification opportunities for smaller producers. The background report points out that these global arrangements can also shape domestic policy space on tariffs, subsidies, and procurement, influencing national food system strategies.

8. Asymmetries in Climate and Environmental Governance

Climate and environmental policy domains involve complex financing mechanisms, technical requirements, and reporting obligations. Countries and communities with limited institutional capacity may find it more difficult to access climate finance or influence technical negotiations. Large-scale mitigation initiatives—such as carbon markets or offset schemes—can bring investment but may also require land-use changes that affect local livelihoods. The report notes that risk-sharing arrangements, environmental compliance frameworks, and climate adaptation programs are often easier for well-organized or well-funded actors to navigate.

9. National Policy and Decision-Making Asymmetries

Within national food governance systems, influence tends to vary across stakeholder groups. Policy processes—such as budget allocation, subsidy design, standard-setting, and strategic planning, but also problem framing, and policy setting—may be shaped more by well-resourced actors with greater access to decision-makers or technical expertise. A prominent example relates to agricultural subsidies and market price support, which in many contexts provide disproportionate benefits to larger, capital-intensive farms or to specific commodity sectors. This can shape production incentives, reinforce input-intensive systems, and limit support for diversified approaches, including the production of more nutritious foods. Limited participation mechanisms, data transparency, and coordination across ministries can further restrict the ability of marginalized groups to influence policy outcomes.

Forms and Dimensions of Power: Power in food systems operates through multiple, overlapping and self-reinforcing dimensions. These dimensions influence norms and values, and shape how decisions are made, how resources are distributed, which knowledge is valued, and whose voices shape policy and market outcomes. Understanding these different expressions of power helps practitioners move beyond surface-level symptoms and engage with the deeper institutional and structural drivers that shape food system behaviour.

- **Visible Power – Formal Rules, Decisions and Institutions**

Visible power refers to the formal and observable arenas where decisions are made: laws, policies, regulations, budgets, standards, and official governance bodies. In food systems, visible power is expressed through policy choices such as subsidy allocations, food safety regulations, public procurement rules, land-use planning, and tariff structures. These formal decisions determine who receives support, which production models are incentivised, and how market access or compliance requirements are structured. Visible power is often the most recognisable dimension, yet rarely the whole story.

- **Hidden Power – Agenda Setting and Control of Participation**

Hidden power shapes who participate in decision-making, which issues are prioritised, and what options or proposals are quietly excluded. It is exercised through informal networks, selective consultations, advisory committees, behind-the-scenes negotiations, or control of information flows. In food systems, hidden power can affect how agendas are set for policy processes, how certain interests gain privileged access to decision-makers, and how less influential groups—such as smaller producers, women, youth or informal traders—may be excluded from critical discussions. Hidden power explains why some policy reforms progress easily while others, even when evidence-based, struggle to gain traction.

- **Invisible Power – Norms, Narratives, Knowledge and Worldviews**

Invisible power operates through beliefs, assumptions, cultural norms, and dominant narratives that shape what is perceived as legitimate, feasible or desirable. This includes ideas about what counts as “modern” agriculture, how productivity is defined, whose knowledge is considered expert, or which diets are viewed as aspirational. These narratives influence policy priorities, research agendas and consumer behaviour, often without being explicitly recognised as expressions of power. Invisible power can reinforce existing models—such as high-input farming or ultra-processed food consumption—by framing alternatives as impractical or marginal.

- **Systemic Power – Deep Structural and Historical Forces**

Systemic power refers to long-standing economic, social and institutional arrangements that shape opportunities and constraints across food systems. These include patterns of market concentration, land tenure systems, financial structures, trade rules, and wider socio-economic inequalities. Systemic power creates the enabling environment in which other forms of power operate. It explains why certain interests are consistently advantaged, why specific production models persist over time, and why transformative change may face structural barriers even when there is political will.

Why Understanding Power Dimensions Matters: Considering visible, hidden, invisible and systemic power together provides a more complete understanding of how influence is exercised within food systems. Focusing on only one dimension—for example, formal decision-making—risks missing the informal, normative and structural dynamics that often determine which policies are adopted, how benefits are distributed, and whose needs are prioritised. A multidimensional view of power helps teams identify leverage points, interpret political feasibility more accurately, and design strategies that are responsive to both institutional realities and lived experience. It also ensures that subsequent steps in the analysis and engagement process address not only immediate challenges but also the deeper forces shaping food system outcomes.

Gaventa's Power Cube Framework: To ensure no dimension is overlooked, FPI proposes to utilize John Gaventa's *Power Cube* as a guiding framework. The Power Cube conceptualizes power across three dimensions—levels, spaces, and forms. Levels refer to the scale of power (from local to national to global)—e.g., local community influence vs. global corporate power. Spaces refer to arenas of decision-making: closed spaces (exclusive, behind closed doors), invited spaces (consultative forums, multi-stakeholder platforms), and claimed/created spaces (grassroots initiatives where less powerful groups set their own agenda). Forms of power align with the visible/hidden/invisible typology discussed above. The Power Cube urges analysts to consider how these dimensions intersect—for example, visible power at the national level in a closed policymaking space (such as a ministry drafting laws without consultation), versus invisible power at the community level (deeply ingrained social norms discouraging women's voices in meetings). By mapping actors and issues onto the cube, we can gain a 3D picture of power dynamics.

The addition of “systemic power” recognises structural forces—such as market liberalisation, patriarchy or colonial legacies—that condition how other forms of power are expressed across different levels and spaces.

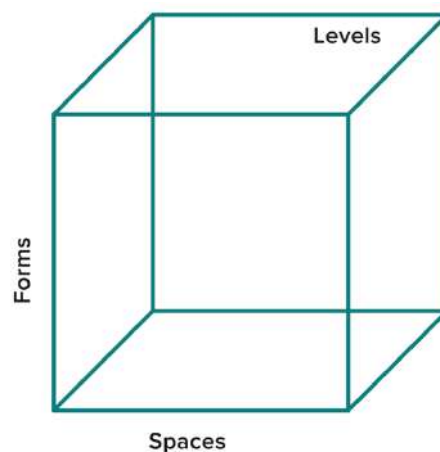


Illustration: Gaventa's Power Cube framework—power operates at multiple Levels (horizontal axis), in different decision Spaces (vertical axis), and in various Forms (depth axis: e.g., visible, hidden, invisible). Analysts should examine how an issue manifests across these dimensions (e.g., a power imbalance might be sustained by invisible norms at local level and hidden influences at global level).

Mapping actors and issues onto the Power Cube helps teams see, for example, how a national-level closed policy space, dominated by a few ministries and corporate actors (visible + hidden power), interacts with local-level invited spaces (e.g., district-level consultative groups) where invisible power (social hierarchies, gender norms) might still limit whose voice is heard.

Positive or negative power: It is important to note that these forms and dimensions of power should not be understood as inherently negative or fixed. Rather than representing static tools of domination, they describe arenas in which influence is exercised and contested. Visible rules can be reformed, hidden agendas can be challenged or strategically navigated, and invisible norms and narratives can be reshaped through communication and coalition-building. Understanding these dimensions helps identify where power imbalances constrain change, but also where opportunities exist to shift incentives, expand participation and harness influence for more equitable food systems transformation. Power is therefore not only something to diagnose as a barrier, but also something that can be mobilized, redistributed and reconfigured.

Power “to, with, within, for”: Power can also be understood in terms of *power within*, *power to*, *power with* and *power for*. *Power within* refers to confidence, self-awareness and a sense of agency grounded in dignity and lived experience, enabling individuals and communities to articulate their priorities and challenge limiting assumptions. *Power to* describes the capacity to act—to influence decisions, claim rights or pursue change through skills, knowledge and access to resources. *Power with* reflects collective strength built through collaboration, alliances and shared action to advance common goals. *Power for* represents the shared vision and values that orient strategies and guide collective efforts toward transformative and equitable food systems change.

Power mapping and systems approaches: Power mapping is consistent with and strengthens systems approaches to food systems transformation as articulated both in UNDP’s recent food systems white paper and FAO’s systems approach guidance. UNDP’s *Supporting Food Systems Transformation Towards Sustainability and Resilience*¹ emphasises that food systems are complex, interconnected and require multidimensional solutions that link governance, structural drivers, value chains and finance to achieve sustainable, inclusive outcomes, and that transformational change depends on better understanding systemic interactions and power relations across actors, institutions and scales. FAO’s *Transforming Food and Agriculture through a Systems Approach*² further articulates how systemic challenges in agrifood systems demand integrated thinking, joined-up action and adaptive governance, and describes key elements such as systems thinking, systems knowledge, systems governance, systems doing, systems investment and systems learning to embed a holistic approach into policy and practice.

Power mapping complements these frameworks by making visible the political and institutional dynamics that shape how systems function and evolve—revealing where rules, incentives and actors reinforce or constrain change—and thereby enhancing the capacity of practitioners to design more coherent, equitable and sustainable interventions.

By establishing this conceptual foundation, country teams ensure a systemic understanding of power before jumping into data gathering. The following sections detail a multi-phase methodology to operationalize these concepts into a practical mapping exercise.

¹ See <https://www.undp.org/facs/publications/undp-white-paper-supporting-food-systems-transformation-towards-sustainability-and-resilience>

² See <https://www.fao.org/food-systems/news/news-detail/transforming-food-and-agriculture-through-a-systems-approach/en>

3. METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The background of the slide features a close-up of a green fern leaf, which is partially obscured by a white, intricate geometric pattern of thin lines forming a mesh or web-like structure. The overall color palette is a mix of deep greens and white.

FPI's Power Mapping Approach unfolds in **four steps**, each building on the last (see Figure below)³. It begins with careful preparation and scoping, then moves to mapping stakeholders, analysing power relations, visualizing networks, and finally using the insights for strategy and action. Throughout, the process is participatory and iterative. Country teams are encouraged to involve diverse stakeholders in the analysis (where feasible) to democratize knowledge and validate findings. The typical sequence of steps is:

1. **Step 1 – Preparation & Scoping:** Define objectives, scope, and team; preliminary desk research on power issues; developing a common framing.
2. **Step 2 – Stakeholder Identification & Mapping:** Map out all key stakeholders in the food system, their interests/influence and their relationships
3. **Step 3 – Power Analysis:** Examine power dynamics (using frameworks like the Power Cube) affecting food system outcomes and identify power hotspots (areas of significant influence)
4. **Step 4 – Strategy Development, Integration and Learning:** Identify entry points to shift power, develop action plans and integrate findings into policy/program design.

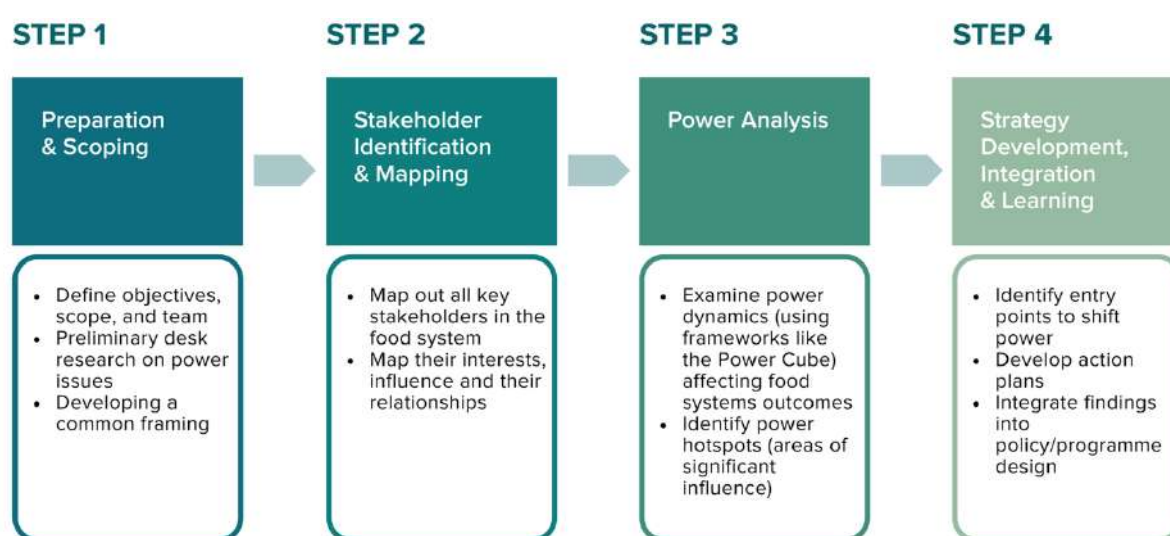


Figure 1: Illustrative multi-step timeline for the Power Mapping process. Each step builds on the previous one, from Preparation thru Strategy Development, Integration and Learning. Countries can adapt the timing to their needs (e.g., Steps 2 and 3 may overlap if stakeholder workshops are used to gather data). Typically, a full mapping exercise might span several months, including time for consultation and validation.

The methodology is intended to be flexible. In some contexts, steps may overlap or iterate (for example, preliminary analysis in Step 1 might be refined after stakeholder input in Step 2). What's important is to document assumptions and decisions at each stage and maintain a clear record of evidence (meeting notes, data sources, etc.). Below, each step is described in detail with recommended steps, tools, and outputs.

This methodology assumes there is existing demand for a power mapping exercise. However, in many contexts there may not be an obvious demand for power analysis. Teams can create momentum by linking the exercise to existing policy processes (e.g., national food-system pathways, climate-action plans, or sectoral reforms), by presenting evidence of how power imbalances have impeded past reforms, and by framing the analysis as a way to improve policy effectiveness and reduce conflict. Highlighting benefits for decision-makers—such as clearer stakeholder landscapes, reduced implementation risks and enhanced social licence—can help to build buy-in among powerful actors.

³ The steps are tailored to Power Mapping for the purpose of FPI, and build on an extensive body of existing methodologies and conceptual frameworks. For example, for a detailed guide to help activists and changemakers build power literacy, see the Just Associates "Just Power" guide here: <https://pressbooks.pub/jass-power-guide/>

Step 1: Preparation & Scoping

Define Purpose and Scope: Begin by clarifying *why* we are conducting the power mapping and *what* its focus will be. Is the aim to inform a national food systems strategy? To unblock a stalled policy reform? The scope might be broad (e.g., an entire national food system) or narrow (e.g., a specific value chain, policy process or institutional change). Pin down the key question or problem statement—for example: “Which power dynamics are constraining policies that incentivize smallholder farmers to adopt agroecological practices?” A clear scope ensures the exercise remains manageable and goal-oriented. It should also be clear which role government will play. Early engagement with high-level government and non-government partners helps to secure political legitimacy and avoid misunderstandings about the exercise’s intent.

UN agencies’ role in power mapping: UNDP and other UN agencies bring comparative advantages to power-mapping exercises. As neutral and trusted conveners with a mandate grounded in human rights and sustainable development, they can facilitate politically sensitive dialogues, broker relationships between disparate stakeholders and provide methodological expertise. However, UN teams must also be aware of political sensitivities. They should assess potential risks, respect national sovereignty and avoid being perceived as interfering in domestic politics. Working in partnership with national institutions and civil-society organisations can strengthen legitimacy.

Assemble the Team: The FPI Secretariat will help form a core analysis team with the right mix of expertise. This typically includes a member of the FPI Secretariat, an international power mapping expert, as well as a national coordinator with political economy expertise. Where possible, we will involve a government counterpart or partner organization from the start to build ownership. Ensure the team is diverse in gender and background to catch different angles of power (e.g., someone attuned to gender power relations, someone with private sector insight, etc.). Decide early how stakeholders will be engaged—e.g., via workshops, interviews, advisory group – and include facilitation specialists if needed.

Roles and responsibilities: The FPI Secretariat and any external power-analysis experts provide methodological guidance, quality assurance and training. National coordinators or partners ensure that the process is adapted to the local political economy, oversee day-to-day tasks and liaise with government counterparts. Government and civil-society partners contribute substantive inputs, validate findings and champion the integration of results into policy and programming.

Background Research: Conduct a desk review of existing information on the food system and political context. Useful inputs include: policy documents (food security strategies, agriculture plans), analyses (in particular prior Political Economy Analysis or Institutional Context Analysis if available), stakeholder mappings from previous projects, and any studies on power or governance in the country. Look for known power issues, e.g., monopolies and oligopolies, historical marginalization of groups or formal vs. informal decision channels. This helps generate initial hypotheses to explore. Also review data on food system performance and recent reforms, as these outcomes often reflect underlying power relations, and assemble data on the current status and spatial distribution of food insecurity, poverty, malnutrition and environmental degradation related to food-system activities. Understanding where negative outcomes are concentrated provides insight into where power imbalances are having the greatest impact and helps prioritise areas for deeper analysis. Summarize key findings in a brief concept note.

Preliminary Stakeholder List: As part of scoping, draft an initial list of stakeholders (individuals, groups, institutions) relevant to the food system or specific focus area. At this stage, list freely—from government ministries, agencies and political figures to private sector entities (agribusinesses, food companies, traders), farmer or producer organizations, civil society and NGOs, consumer associations, marginalized groups (e.g., landless labourers, women’s groups, Indigenous communities), research institutions, donors, and media. This list will be expanded and refined in Step 2, but starting early ensures the team knows whose perspectives might be needed. Identify any obvious gaps in knowledge about these stakeholders that may require research or outreach.

Plan the Process: Develop a brief **work plan** for the mapping exercise. This includes defining the timeframe, scheduling key activities (such as workshops, interviews, analysis sessions), and assigning roles. Also consider logistics for stakeholder engagement: Will a multi-stakeholder **power analysis workshop** be held? Or conduct one-on-one confidential interviews for sensitive insights? Allocate time for validation of results (possibly a debrief workshop or circulating a draft for input). Planning in advance, with management support, will secure the necessary time and resources. *Importantly, secure any needed buy-in* – for instance, inform senior management or government partners of the exercise’s purpose and how they will be kept informed or involved.

Indicative timeline and resources: A comprehensive power-mapping exercise as described in this guide typically unfolds over a period of 4-8 months. The sequence generally includes a one-month desk review, 2-4 months for stakeholder mapping, consultations and power analysis, and one-two months for validation, strategy development and presentation of results. Resource requirements vary by scope, but usually involve staff or consultant time, facilitation costs for workshops or focus groups, data collection, and logistical expenses. More narrowly focused exercises (e.g., on a very specific policy issue) may require less time and lower cost.

Develop a common understanding of key concepts, values and objectives: A core element of Step 1 is ensuring that all partners involved in the process share a **common understanding of key power concepts** before analysis begins. Because different institutions and stakeholders may use the term “power” in different ways, it is important to establish a clear and mutually agreed framing from the outset. This involves jointly exploring the basic concepts—such as **visible, hidden, invisible and systemic power**—and discussing what these mean in the specific context of the project. By taking time to clarify terminology, surface assumptions, and reflect on how each organisation or actor perceives and experiences power, the team builds a shared conceptual foundation. This early alignment reduces the risk of misinterpretation later in the process and ensures that forthcoming discussions focus not only on immediate challenges but also on the deeper institutional and relational dynamics shaping food system outcomes.

Similarly, at the outset, it is important to discuss and agree with key partners on the values that will guide the analysis—such as equity, sustainability, human rights and gender equality. Clearly articulating these normative objectives ensures that all participants understand the rationale for examining power dynamics. **By the end of Step 1, you should have: a clear mapping purpose and scope, an informed team and stakeholder engagement plan, and a compilation of background info and initial stakeholder list. These set the stage for a focused and credible mapping in subsequent steps.**

- **Key Questions to be Answered during this Step**

1. **What is the precise purpose of the power mapping?**
What policy process, reform, value chain or institutional challenge must the power analysis help clarify or unblock?
2. **Do all partners share a common understanding of key power concepts** (visible, hidden, invisible, systemic)?
Are there any differing interpretations or assumptions that need to be aligned before moving forward?
3. **What initial hypotheses exist about power dynamics** (e.g., corporate concentration, exclusion of certain groups, informal influence pathways)?
What evidence is needed to validate or challenge these?
4. **Who must be involved or consulted in the process**, and *what mechanisms* (interviews, workshops, advisory groups) *will ensure safe and credible engagement?*

Step 2: Stakeholder Identification & Network Mapping

A. Identifying and mapping stakeholders

Step 2 dives deeper into who the key actors are and what their interests and influence entail. This is the foundation for power analysis—after all, power is exercised by and through stakeholders. The main activities in this Step are stakeholder identification, characterization, and preliminary mapping of their relative power/influence. Often this step combines desk analysis with participatory exercises (e.g., a stakeholder mapping workshop).

Comprehensive Stakeholder Inventory: Using the preliminary list from Step 1 as a starting point, broaden and finalize the list of stakeholders relevant to the food system or focus issue. Cast a wide net to include:

- **Public Sector:** Relevant ministries (e.g., Agriculture, Trade, Finance, Health), regulatory bodies, local government authorities, parastatals or state-owned enterprises in food/agriculture, politicians or power brokers, and traditional authorities in some contexts.
- **Civil Society & Academia:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on food security, nutrition, environment, or farmer rights; community-based organizations; consumer rights groups; farmer unions; indigenous peoples' organizations; research institutes, universities, and think tanks with expertise in food systems.
- **Private Sector:** Large agribusiness corporations (input suppliers, commodity buyers, food processors, retailers), small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the value chain, farmers' cooperatives, traders and distributors, financial institutions (banks, investors), and chambers of commerce or business associations.
- **International Actors:** Donor agencies, UN agencies (FAO, WFP, IFAD, etc.), international initiatives or coalitions, transnational companies or investors active in-country, and relevant regional bodies.
- **Informal or Unusual Actors:** Don't forget less obvious players who hold power, such as *social or cultural influencers* (e.g., prominent religious leaders or media figures shaping narratives on food and land), *criminal networks* (if issues like organized crime in commodity trade or land grabs are relevant), or *labour unions* (for farm workers, etc.).

Aim for an inclusive mapping that surfaces marginalized groups (women, youth, specific ethnic or livelihood groups) who may lack power—their perspective is crucial for a complete picture, even if they are not traditionally “power holders.”

Stakeholder Profile Matrix: For each stakeholder or stakeholder group identified, collect information and characterize their role. An effective way is to create a Stakeholder Mapping Matrix (see Annex 1 for a template). The matrix can include columns such as: Stakeholder Name (or category), Type/Sector, Main Interests or Objectives, Level (local/regional/national/global), Power/Influence (evaluation of how much they can affect food system outcomes), and current stance on the food system change that is the focus of the power mapping (supportive, resistant, neutral). Fill this matrix using all available data: reports, team knowledge, expert interviews, etc. Keep entries succinct. The goal is to understand not just who they are, but what they want and how much power they wield.

For example:

Stakeholder	Type / Role	Interests / Agenda	Level	Influence (H/M/L)	Notes (Stance, Resources, etc.)
Ministry of Agriculture	Government policymaker	Increase agricultural GDP, maintain political support among rural voters	National	High	Leads food policy; Minister is a key decision-maker (visible power)
Small Farmers' Co-op	Producer organization	Fair prices, land rights, market access	Local/ Provincial	Low-Med	Large membership but limited voice in national policy (seeks invited spaces)
BigAgro Corp.	Agri-food company	Profit growth, favourable regulations (e.g., input subsidies)	National/ Global	High	Dominant in seed & fertilizer market; significant lobbying influence (hidden power)
Women's Farming Network	Civil society (NGO)	Women's empowerment, access to credit and land	Local/ National	Medium	Growing influence via advocacy; limited resources but allies in media (building 'power with')
UN Agency	Development partner	Food security, government capacity-building	National	Medium	Provides technical advice; convening power in policy dialogues (invited spaces)

Table: Example stakeholder mapping matrix (partial). The actual Annex 1 template provides a blank table for teams to fill in stakeholders relevant to their context.

Such a matrix helps organize complex information. It allows the team to “*see stakeholders at a glance, categorized by key characteristics that matter*”. For noting each actor’s interests and influence, be honest and evidence-based—use citations or multiple sources for claims like “High influence” (e.g., budget control, legal mandate, informal authority, etc.).

Power-Interest Mapping: Once the matrix is populated, the next step is to map stakeholders on a simple Power vs. Interest grid (also known as a power-interest matrix). This is a classic tool to visually plot how much influence each stakeholder has *vertically* (high to low power) against their level of interest or support for the change *horizontally* (from strongly opposed to strongly in favour). It helps identify which stakeholders should be managed closely and which require only monitoring. Typically:

- High power, high interest (or strongly supportive) stakeholders are *Key Players* to engage closely (they can be champions or, if opposed, major blockers).
- High power, low interest stakeholders need to be kept satisfied—they might not care deeply but could exercise power if upset.
- Low power, high interest stakeholders should be kept informed and involved where possible—they are allies but may need empowerment to increase their influence.
- Low power, low interest stakeholders require minimal effort – monitor them in case their stance or influence changes.

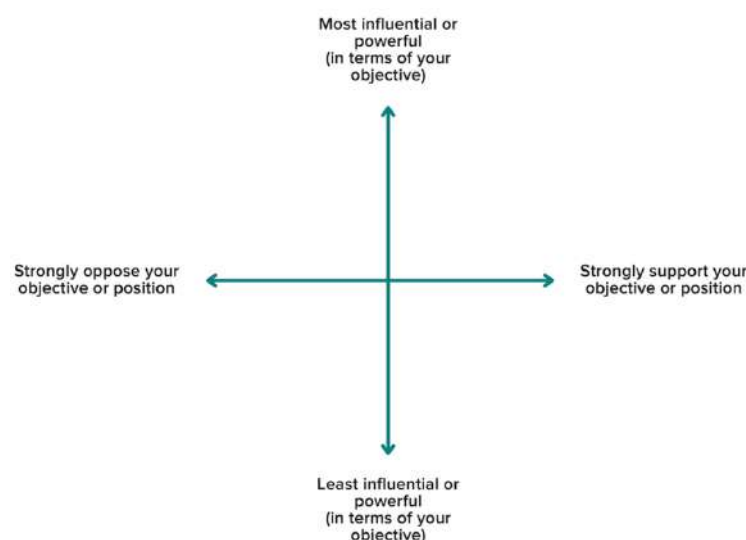


Figure 2: Generic Power-Interest Grid (influence vs. support). Stakeholders are placed according to their power/influence (vertical axis) and their level of support or opposition to the objective (horizontal axis). This blank template (see Annex 3) can be used to map actors in country context. For example, those in the top-right quadrant have high power and strongly support the objective – ideal allies to “manage closely”, whereas top-left are high power but opposed—requiring strategies to address their concerns or neutralize their influence.

In a workshop setting, this can be done with sticky notes on a large poster or whiteboard grid. The discussion among participants about where to place each actor often yields rich insight (e.g., “Is the national agribusiness association *really* supportive or just neutral?”). Remember the placement is relative—focus on ranking stakeholders against each other rather than finding an “exact” spot. The aim is to highlight relationships: perhaps there is a cluster of low-power supportive stakeholders (potential coalition partners to build a collective voice), or a single player that stands out as high-power and deeply opposed (a critical actor to strategize around).

Note on interpretation: The power–interest grid in this step reflects the team’s initial assessment of perceived influence, based on available information and stakeholder consultations. At this stage, placements should be treated as working hypotheses rather than definitive judgments. Teams should document briefly why each actor was positioned as high, medium or low power (e.g., formal authority, financial resources, agenda-setting capacity, network access). These assumptions will be tested in Step 3 through a more structured analysis of sources, forms and levels of power. It is expected that some positions may shift once hidden influence, informal networks or structural constraints are examined in greater depth.

Categorize and Prioritize: By the end of this exercise, the team should be able to clearly see which stakeholders matter most for the project’s objectives. Identify the top 5–10 key stakeholders who have either high power or high stakes in the issue (or both). These will feature prominently in the power analysis (Step 3) and strategy (Step 4). Also identify if there are any obvious gaps in engagement—for instance, an influential stakeholder that the UNDP team has had little interaction with; flag these for potential outreach or further research.

Sensitive contexts: When power imbalances involve state actors, the scoping process should adjust accordingly. Consider engaging neutral facilitators or independent experts, using confidential interviews rather than open workshops, and developing risk-mitigation measures to protect participants. The team must weigh the political feasibility of recommendations and ensure that the process does not expose vulnerable stakeholders to retaliation. A thorough stakeholder mapping ensures the power analysis doesn’t miss any major actor or perspective. It grounds the analysis in the real actors and creates a shared understanding among the team and partners about “who’s who” in the food system landscape.

B. Network Mapping

A network map is essentially a sociogram that depicts stakeholders as nodes and the relationships between them as links. It translates the stakeholder matrix and power analysis into a graphical “power network” of the food system. To create one, list the key stakeholders as nodes (one may use circles labelled with stakeholder names or categories). Then draw lines or arrows between nodes to represent significant relationships of influence or flows of resources. For example, an arrow from “Ministry of Finance” to “Ministry of Agriculture” might indicate that Finance controls budget allocations to Agriculture (influence over resource power). A line between a corporation and a farmers’ association might represent a contract farming relationship (or perhaps lobbying if the direction is one way). Use line styles or colours to denote different types of relationships if desired (solid line for formal authority, dashed for informal influence, etc.).

Keep the network map focused on the most relevant stakeholders and relations to avoid clutter – it is not necessary to connect everyone to everyone, only the meaningful power links. The result is a web that shows clusters and hubs of power. Often, it will become clear that some actors are highly connected hubs (wielding influence over many others), while some are isolated at the periphery. Network maps make these patterns explicit, which can guide strategy (e.g., an isolated but important stakeholder might need bridging connections; a highly connected hub might be a critical leverage point to engage or monitor).

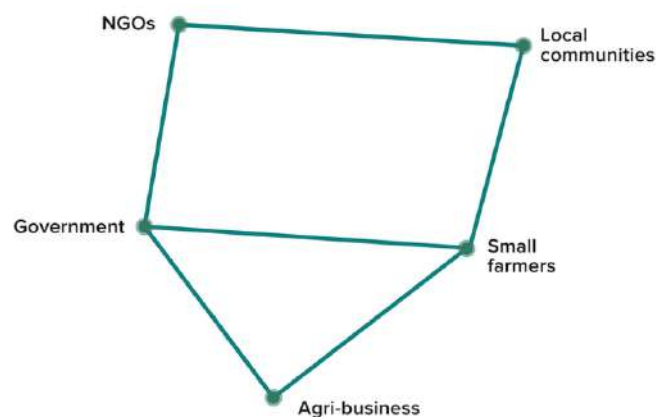


Figure 3: Example stakeholder network map illustrating power relationships in a food system. Nodes represent stakeholder groups (e.g., Government, Agri-Business, Small Farmers, NGOs, Local Communities), and lines indicate influence or partnerships. In this simplified illustration, the Government is connected to both Agri-Business and NGOs (indicating interactions with both corporate and civil society sectors), Agri-Business links to Small Farmers (e.g., through supply contracts or lobbying influence), NGOs connect with Local Communities (supporting grassroots empowerment), etc. Such a network diagram helps identify which actors are central or broker connections (Government appears central here), and which relationships are strong or weak. Actual country maps can add directionality or weight to connections (e.g., arrow thickness for strength of influence).

Network mapping can be done with specialized software or simply by hand on a flipchart. The process of co-creating a network map with stakeholders in a workshop can itself be empowering and enlightening—participants physically draw connections and debate their significance, often uncovering new insights (e.g., “I didn’t realize NGO X had direct ties to the Prime Minister’s office!”).

Stakeholder relationship maps are valuable because they visualize how stakeholders are linked and the degree of influence in those links. They can expose, for instance, that two groups opposing each other actually share a common link that could be a communication channel.

C. Influence / Power Mapping Diagrams

In addition to network graphs, other diagrams might be useful to illustrate specific facets of power:

- A Power Map Grid can be refined and annotated. For instance, overlay arrows to show desired movement (e.g., “move stakeholder X from opposition toward support” through engagement). Or use size of stakeholder labels to indicate power magnitude on the grid.
- Concentric circles of influence: To complement power-interest grids, teams may use concentric-circle diagrams. Begin by placing the core decision or policy issue at the centre and then positioning stakeholders in circles according to their proximity to decision-making: those with the most influence appear in the inner circle, while those with less influence are placed further out. Different colours or symbols can denote the forms of power they primarily exercise (visible, hidden or invisible). This visualisation helps teams discuss positionality and identify which actors need to be brought closer to the centre.
- Timeline of power shifts: If historical perspective is needed, a timeline can illustrate how power relations have changed over time (e.g., a certain group gained power after a reform in 2015, or a new coalition formed in 2020). While not a map of relationships, it provides context on the dynamics’ evolution.
- Issue Flow or Decision Tree: Sometimes mapping out how a decision is made (who inputs, who approves, who influences at each step) in a flowchart style can expose choke points and hidden influencers.
- Mapping financial flows: In addition to identifying stakeholders and their relationships, it is important to understand how money flows through the food system. Teams can trace major sources of financing—such as public subsidies, agricultural credit, donor funding, private investment and remittances—along value chains. Who controls these flows? Which actors benefit, and which are excluded?

In sum, visual mapping is a powerful adjunct to the written analysis – it turns abstract power relations into something people can see and discuss. A well-crafted power map can quickly convey the essence of how different food systems stakeholders interrelate.

However, note that the stakeholder matrix, power-interest grid and network map serve complementary purposes. Fill the matrix first and then draw from it to create other visuals. Using only those diagrams that add analytical value in your context is key for avoiding duplication.

The influence diagrams developed in this step should be treated as preliminary hypotheses rather than final power assessments. While the grid and concentric circles help visualize perceived influence and proximity to decision-making, their placements can only be validated and, where necessary, revised during the more systematic power analysis in Step 3.

By the end of Step 2, you should have: a comprehensive stakeholder inventory, an understanding of key relationships and alliances, and one or more visual maps (e.g., stakeholder matrix, power–interest grid, network diagram) that illustrate influence and connections across the system. These provide the foundation for analysing how power operates across actors, levels and spaces.

- **Key Questions to be Answered during this Step**

1. Who are all the potential actors that influence—or are influenced by—the food system focus area? *Are any groups missing, particularly marginalized actors?*
2. How do stakeholders connect to each other, formally and informally? *Where are the hubs, brokers, alliances, or isolated actors in the network?*
3. Which stakeholders are most critical for the analysis and eventual strategy, *based on their power, position in the network, or stake in the issue?*

Step 3: Power Analysis

In Step 3, the team analyses **how power is distributed and exercised** among the stakeholders and structures identified. This involves understanding the power asymmetries that inhibit inclusive food-system transformation. A power asymmetry exists when influence, resources or participation rights are unevenly distributed such that certain actors or groups benefit at the expense of others. Mapping these asymmetries requires examining who holds power (sources), how it is exercised (forms), where it operates (levels and spaces), and who is marginalised as a result.

This is the heart of the methodology: understanding the political economy factors and power dynamics that explain why the food system is the way it is, and what might enable or constrain change. The analysis uses the conceptual frameworks from earlier (visible/hidden/invisible power, Power Cube dimensions, etc.) to examine the data gathered.

A. Analysing Power Dynamics

Start by systematically reviewing each of the key stakeholders (especially those prioritized in Step 2) through a power lens:

- i. **Validate Interests and Incentives:** For each actor, assess their true interests and what incentives or constraints they face. Who benefits from the status quo, and who would benefit from change? For example, if farm gate prices are low, traders and processors might benefit (incentive to maintain), while small farmers suffer (incentive to push for change). Understanding incentives helps predict behaviour—e.g., an actor benefiting from a subsidy will likely resist its removal (hidden power might be used to lobby quietly against reforms).
- ii. **Sources of Power:** Identify where each actor's power comes from. Is it formal authority (e.g., a ministry's legal mandate—a source of visible power)? Is it control of resources (a company's financial clout or market share)? Is it social capital (traditional legitimacy or public support)? Or perhaps knowledge (technical expertise giving them agenda-setting power)? Many NGOs, for instance, leverage moral authority or information campaigns (soft power) rather than formal power. Document these sources. This also includes identifying alliances or networks that bolster power—e.g., a farmers' association may have modest direct power but if allied with a global NGO campaign, their influence grows (*power with alliances*).
- iii. **Forms of Power in Play:** Next, for each actor (or cluster of actors), consider how they exert power in visible, hidden, or invisible ways. For example: The national agribusiness lobby may exert **hidden power** by influencing which topics are (or aren't) on the policy agenda – perhaps land reform is kept off the table due to their behind-the-scenes pressure. Alternatively, powerful cultural or religious institutions might wield **invisible power** by shaping societal values (e.g., norms around food preferences or gender roles in farming). Meanwhile, government decisions (laws, budgets) illustrate **visible power** at work. Mapping these forms helps reveal *why certain decisions go certain ways*. A table or chart can be useful: list key power dynamics observed under each category (visible/hidden/invisible/systemic) – see Annex 2 for a template to log such observations.
- iv. **Analysing Forms, Levels and Spaces of Power (Applying the Power Cube):** For each key actor (or cluster of actors), analyse how power is exercised across the different dimensions of the Power Cube. Begin by examining the **forms of power** in play – visible, hidden, invisible and systemic. Visible power may be expressed through formal decisions such as laws, budgets or regulations. Hidden power may shape agendas behind the scenes, for example when an agribusiness lobby influences which issues are discussed and which are excluded (e.g., keeping land reform off the table). Invisible power operates through norms, values and belief systems, such as cultural narratives about food preferences or gender roles in farming. Systemic power reflects deeper structural arrangements—market concentration, trade regimes or institutional rules—that shape incentives and constrain alternatives. Documenting these dynamics in a simple table (see Annex 2) can help make implicit patterns explicit.

Next, situate these dynamics within the **levels and spaces** dimensions of the Power Cube. Identify the level at which each power dynamic operates—local, sub-national, national, regional or global. Often, bottlenecks occur at higher levels even if impacts are felt locally (e.g., global commodity pricing structures limiting local farmers' options), while other constraints may stem from local visible power (e.g., elite capture of community resources). Also analyse the spaces in which decisions are made and contested. Are key decisions taken in closed spaces with limited participation? Are there invited spaces, such as multi-stakeholder platforms, and if so, who participates and who is excluded? Are claimed spaces being used by civil society to articulate alternative demands? Understanding how forms of power interact across levels and spaces helps identify both where change is blocked and where openings for influence may exist.

By combining the *forms* (visible/hidden/invisible) with *levels* and *spaces*, the team ensures a comprehensive analysis. It might be helpful to diagram this, for example by creating a matrix of Level vs. Space and note where power is concentrated or absent. Perhaps the analysis will find that at the **national level**, the formal policy space is closed and dominated by a few government and corporate actors (visible + hidden power combined), whereas at the **local level**, invited participatory spaces exist (like local food councils) but invisible power (social hierarchies) prevents truly equal voice. These insights are gold in identifying where interventions might be needed—e.g., supporting local “invited spaces” to become more inclusive or linking them to national agendas.

B. Identifying Power Asymmetries

At this stage, distil the analysis into a set of key power asymmetries affecting the thematic area or policy reform topic under review. This step synthesizes earlier observations into a structured assessment of where power is concentrated, excluded or misaligned. The guiding question is:

“Which structural imbalances in this food system most significantly constrain equitable, sustainable transformation?”

The following categories reflect the nine core power asymmetries introduced earlier. Depending on the context, some may be more salient than others:

A. Corporate Concentration Across Food System Value Chains

1. **Concentration in Agricultural Inputs**
A small number of firms dominate seeds, agrochemicals, fertilizers or digital farming platforms, limiting farmer choice and shaping production models.
2. **Concentration in Food Processing and Manufacturing**
Market dominance in processing and manufacturing may influence pricing, standards and supply chain terms, affecting upstream producers and downstream consumers.
3. **Concentration in Food Retail, Supermarkets and Digital Platforms**
Large retailers or e-commerce platforms may exert significant bargaining power over suppliers and shape consumer access, pricing and product availability.

B. Inequitable Access to Resources

4. **Unequal Access to Land, Territories and Natural Resources**
Land ownership patterns, tenure insecurity or exclusionary legal frameworks may concentrate control of productive assets in the hands of elites or corporations.
5. **Unequal Access to Finance and Capital**
Credit systems, subsidy schemes or investment flows may favour larger actors, limiting opportunities for small-scale producers, women or marginalized groups.
6. **Unequal Access to Knowledge, Technology and Data**
Control over research, digital infrastructure, extension services or proprietary data may reinforce structural advantages and exclude certain actors from innovation pathways.

C. Governance and Policy Power Asymmetries

7. **Asymmetries in Global Trade, Standards and Geopolitics**

International trade regimes, global commodity markets or donor priorities may shape national policy space, limiting domestic autonomy or resilience.

8. **Asymmetries in Climate and Environmental Governance**

Climate finance allocation, carbon markets or environmental regulation may advantage certain sectors or actors while externalizing costs to others.

9. **National Policy and Decision-Making Asymmetries**

Domestic governance processes may privilege certain interests through closed decision-making spaces, regulatory capture or limited stakeholder participation.

For each asymmetry identified, note who benefits and who loses from it, and how entrenched it appears (is it backed by law? By norms? By lack of capacity?). This can be summarized in a brief narrative or table. *For instance:* “Land & Resource Rights Asymmetry: Large landowners hold formal title to majority of arable land, while small farmers lease insecurely. Traditional gender norms and inheritance laws (invisible power) exclude women from land ownership. This imbalance leads to unequal bargaining power and perpetuates rural poverty.” The Annex 2 template allows teams to list such findings under the four power dimensions, or by thematic area.

Validating Analysis: It is highly recommended to validate these findings with a broader group to avoid biases. This could be done via a workshop where the team presents initial conclusions and invites feedback from experts or stakeholder reps. Alternatively, form a small advisory group (including e.g., a government partner, a civil society leader, an academic) to review the analysis document. Validation helps correct any misperceptions and also builds consensus on the diagnosis of power problems.

By the end of Step 3, the project team should have a solid narrative of how power dynamics are affecting food system transformation. This narrative, backed by examples and evidence, will inform the strategy to navigate these dynamics. It may also be an output in its own right—for example, a Power Analysis Report or annex to a food system roadmap. Remember, “power mapping visualizes relationships between stakeholders, based on decision-making power and their positions”—the analysis should clearly visualize and articulate those relationships.

C. Analysing Resistance from Incumbent Actors

A key component of Step 3 is assessing how influential or incumbent actors may respond to potential changes emerging from the power analysis. Most food system reforms—whether related to subsidies, standards, governance arrangements, or market structures—create redistribution of influence or resources. Actors who benefit from current arrangements may therefore have incentives to delay, reshape, or quietly resist change. Understanding these incentives is not about assigning blame but about gaining a realistic picture of how political and institutional dynamics may affect reform feasibility. Identifying likely resisters, the forms of power they can draw on, and the channels through which they might act allows teams to interpret power “hotspots” more accurately and anticipate where challenges, delays or negotiation needs may arise.

A method for Mapping Resistance. The analysis can be carried out using a light, structured method that draws on elements of force-field analysis and political economy incentive mapping. This involves three steps:

(1) Identifying potential resisters by listing actors who may perceive risks to their interests and noting what incentives or past behaviours suggest this. This could come out of the power/interest grid prepared in Step 2.

(2) Assessing likely resistance strategies, considering whether they are more likely to use visible means (e.g., lobbying, formal objections), hidden mechanisms (e.g., informal veto points, delays), narrative-based strategies (e.g., reframing reforms as risky), or structural avenues (e.g., relying on regulatory gaps or market dominance).

(3) Analysing potential implications by discussing how these strategies might influence timing, political risks, stakeholder confidence or operational feasibility, and what mitigation measures might be needed. Incorporating these steps into Step 3 ensures that the power analysis captures not only where influence lies, but also how actors may respond to proposed changes—providing a more grounded foundation for strategy development in Step 4.

Integrated analysis: To reduce duplication, it is possible to capture the interests, incentives, sources of power, forms of power, levels and spaces for each key actor in a single matrix. For example, by expanding the template in Annex 2 so that each row corresponds to a stakeholder and columns capture their interests, sources of power, the primary form(s) of power they exercise, the level(s) at which they operate, and the decision spaces they occupy. Observed power asymmetries and potential leverage points can be summarized in a separate column.

By the end of Step 3, you should have: a structured analysis of power asymmetries, including key sources and forms of power, decision-making spaces, resistance dynamics and financial flows where relevant. You should also have identified priority leverage points for shifting inequitable dynamics. These insights form the analytical basis for strategy development.

- **Key Questions to be Answered during this Step**

1. Who are all the actors that influence—or are influenced by—the food system focus area?
2. What are each actor's interests, incentives, influence, and relationships?
What motivates them, and what constraints or opportunities shape their behaviour?
3. What forms of power (visible, hidden, invisible, systemic) are most strongly shaping outcomes in this context?
Which actors rely on which forms of power?
4. How do power relations play out across levels and spaces (local–national–global; closed–invited–claimed)?
Which spaces are open or closed, and to whom?
5. Which power asymmetries or barriers are the most significant, and how do they affect food system outcomes?
Who benefits and who is disadvantaged?
6. Where are the most credible leverage points or “power hotspots”—the places where a small intervention could shift dynamics?

Power Cube Analysis (IDS)

A conceptual tool from the Institute of Development Studies for analysing power across three dimensions: levels (from local to global), spaces of engagement (closed, invited, claimed/created), and forms of power (visible, hidden, invisible).

- Purpose: Helps make sense of complex power dynamics by situating each finding or stakeholder in the “cube”—for instance, distinguishing overt power (e.g., official authority) from hidden influences or cultural norms.
- Use-Case: After data collection, analysts can use the Power Cube to categorize observations —e.g., noting that corporate lobbying is a form of hidden power at the national level, or that small farmers lack an “invited space” to voice concerns. This framework supports validation by ensuring all dimensions of power have been considered when interpreting results.
- Source: IDS Powercube project (widely used in NGO power analysis)—“one of the most important uses of the powercube is for analysis of power dynamics across a range of fields”^[11] (open-access concept with guides online).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

An analytical method to examine how language, narratives, and framing reflect and reinforce power relations.

- Purpose: Reveals the “discursive power” wielded by different actors—for example, how dominant narratives (in policies, media, or meetings) can marginalize alternative viewpoints.
- Use-Case: In Step 3, practitioners can analyse policy documents, speeches, or media coverage collected earlier to see how issues are talked about. For instance, a CDA might uncover that government reports consistently use terms that favour industrial agriculture (“efficiency”, “modernization”) while downplaying smallholder perspectives—indicating a power bias in discourse. Such findings can be validated with stakeholders by discussing whose narratives are missing or misrepresented.
- Source: Academic/open research—CDA has been applied in food systems to “illuminate the discursive power that shapes the future of food” (method freely documented in research literature).

Force Field Analysis

A simple participatory analysis tool (originating from Kurt Lewin’s work) used to visually identify “driving” vs. “restraining” forces around a given change objective.

- Purpose: Plots the factors or stakeholders that push towards change on one side, and those that resist change on the other, to analyse the balance of power for or against a proposal.

Step 4: Strategy Development & Integration

With a deep understanding of power dynamics now in hand (through both analysis and visuals), Step 4 focuses on **using those insights to inform action**. The ultimate purpose of power mapping in FPI is to help design interventions, policies, or advocacy strategies that address the identified power asymmetries and leverage opportunities for change. This step involves formulating strategies and integrating the findings into programming.

A. Identify Entry Points for Change

Revisit each key power asymmetry or barrier identified in Step 3 and ask, “*What can be done about this?*”. Consider both **navigating existing power** and **shifting power structures**:

- For power asymmetries that are entrenched, the strategy may be to *navigate* or work around them. For example, if a certain elite group blocks policy X, an entry point might be to find a champion within that group or to frame the policy in terms that align with their interests (“find common ground”). Or, if formal spaces are closed, perhaps create parallel **invited spaces** (multi-stakeholder dialogues) to build momentum from outside and then feed into closed spaces gradually.
- For other issues, the goal will be to *transform* or reduce the power imbalance. If smallholder voices are absent, one strategy could be **capacity building and empowerment** activities (strengthening *power within* and *power to* for those groups) combined with institutional reforms like mandatory inclusion of their representatives in decision forums (*power with* alliances to enter invited spaces). If corporate concentration is the problem, strategies might involve **policy reforms** (e.g., antitrust laws, support for cooperatives) to level the playing field – recognizing this likely involves confronting powerful interests with evidence and coalition support.

Each entry point should be grounded in the reality of what is feasible, and the incentives involved. Use the earlier analysis: Who would support this change? Who would resist, and how might their opposition be managed or mitigated? For example, if a policy to limit sugary drinks is needed for nutrition (but big beverage companies hold hidden power), an entry point could be to mobilize consumer groups and health advocates (*power with*) to counter industry lobbying, while engaging reformist elements in government who can champion new regulations.

B. Leverage and Ally Mapping

Identify potential **agents of change** and allies who can help shift power balances. The power map likely revealed some stakeholders who, while not currently most powerful, have latent capacity or are strategically positioned. Perhaps there is a progressive private sector player or a reform-minded politician, or a youth movement gaining traction on food issues. Bring them into the strategy – how can FPI or partners support and amplify these actors?

Conversely, identify **opponents** or high-power status-quo defenders; plan how to neutralize or negotiate with them. Sometimes opposition can be softened by addressing underlying interests (e.g., compensating losers of a reform, or phasing changes in slowly). The **network relationships** drawn in Step 2 can guide how to reach certain actors—maybe influencing a minister requires working through a trusted advisor, or shifting public opinion (invisible power) to in turn put pressure on decision-makers.

C. Intervention Design

Translating analysis into action requires selecting interventions that directly target the identified power asymmetries. For example, strategies can build the capacity of marginalised groups to exercise agency (“power within” and “power to”) through investments in producer organisations, leadership development, legal empowerment and access to knowledge.

They can also foster alliances and coalitions (“power with”) by linking civil-society organisations, research institutions, reform-minded politicians and private-sector champions around shared goals. Where necessary, interventions may confront entrenched power structures (“power over”) through advocacy for policy and legal reforms, regulatory enforcement and the creation of more inclusive governance bodies. Intervention design should not assume that all strategies to address power asymmetries lie solely with UNDP and its immediate partners. Food systems transformation takes place within a broader strategy ecosystem, where many actors—such as policymakers, legal advocates, researchers, social movements, community organizations, businesses—pursue different but sometimes complementary approaches.

Mapping this wider landscape helps clarify not only what UNDP can do, but also how its interventions can align with, support or complement the efforts of others. Tools such as a Strategy Ecosystem map or a Power & Strategy Matrix⁴ can help teams consider how different strategies respond to different forms of power—for example, exposing hidden influence, opening closed decision-making spaces, or strengthening collective agency. Taking this broader view encourages coordination, identifies potential allies, and ensures that intervention design reflects the full range of actors shaping change.

Based on entry points and allies, outline concrete **interventions**. These could be:

- **Policy advocacy and dialogue:** e.g., convening multi-stakeholder policy dialogues (using UNDP’s convening power to open up *invited spaces*), creating evidence briefs to challenge dominant narratives (countering invisible power with facts and reframed stories), or supporting champions to introduce legislation.
- **Capacity and coalition building:** e.g., training and empowering marginalized groups to raise their voice (building “power within” and “power to”), facilitating the formation of coalitions or networks among like-minded stakeholders (building “power with” – such as a coalition of civil society and academic voices to lobby for change).
- **Pilots and demonstrations:** Sometimes demonstrating an alternative can undercut the power of incumbents. For instance, supporting a pilot of community-based agroecology farms might challenge the narrative that only industrial farming can feed the country. Success stories can shift invisible power (mindsets) and provide leverage in negotiations.
- **Strategic communications:** Use media and communications to shine light on hidden power dynamics. A well-crafted communications campaign (possibly in partnership with journalists or influencers) can make invisible issues visible to the public, thereby creating pressure for change (for example, exposing how much market share a few companies have could build demand for antitrust action).
- **Institutional reforms:** In some cases, recommend governance changes to institutionalize more balanced power. This could be supporting the design of inclusive decision-making bodies (e.g., a Food Systems Council that gives seats to farmers, women, youth), improving transparency mechanisms (open data portals on food budgets, etc.), or electoral reforms at local level to increase accountability. These are longer-term but address root causes in the “rules of the game” (visible power frameworks).
- **Financial reform:** If the analysis identifies financial asymmetries, strategies might include establishing credit lines for smallholders, women and youth at preferential rates; incorporating ESG criteria into public procurement contracts; supporting financial cooperatives; and promoting anti-monopoly regulations or competition policies. Donors and governments can also align investment incentives with equitable outcomes, for example by providing grants to farmer-owned processing facilities or guaranteeing loans for agroecological enterprises.

⁴ See for more details on this, Chapter 6 of the Just Power Guide by Just Associates, here: <https://pressbooks.pub/jass-power-guide/part/chapter-6-power-and-strategy/>

Every action proposed should tie back to the specific power issue it addresses. It can be helpful to make a table linking *Power Issue* -> *Strategy/Action* -> *Expected outcome*. For instance: “Lack of smallholder voice in policy (power asymmetry) -> Establish quarterly consultative forums with smallholder reps and ministry (action) -> increases transparency and injects their input into policy (outcome).”

Prioritising catalytic entry points: Given limited resources, it is recommended to prioritise actions that have the potential to produce catalytic effects across sectors and over time. Examples include establishing inclusive multi-stakeholder food councils that institutionalise participatory decision-making or developing open data platforms that democratise access to information on budgets, land use or market prices. Such initiatives can reshape power relations by institutionalising voice and enhancing public oversight.

D. Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Finally, plan to monitor the power landscape over time. Power dynamics are **not static**—actors can gain or lose power (e.g., after an election, or due to economic shifts), and unforeseen events (like a climate shock or pandemic) can alter narratives and priorities. The initial power map is a baseline; update it periodically. Set indicators if possible (though power is hard to quantify, proxies like “number of smallholder orgs participating in policy meetings” or “concentration ratio in market X” can be tracked). Be ready to adapt strategies if, say, a new coalition of opponents emerges, or an ally leaves the scene. In volatile contexts, consider a scenario planning approach: “If actor X comes to power, how do we adjust?” The power mapping team might even remain as a task force to advise on such shifts.

Teams might want to set up mechanisms to update the power map periodically, for example on an annual basis or after major political or economic events. If possible, establishing a multi-stakeholder advisory group can provide ongoing feedback and help adapt strategies in response to changing dynamics. In summary, Step 4 is about turning analysis into actionable change strategies. It’s where the UNDP FPI initiative and partners decide how to build more equitable power arrangements in the food system, enabling previously excluded voices to influence decisions, and encouraging those with power to use it responsibly for the public good. The strategies developed here should directly tackle the barriers identified earlier, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainable, systemic change in the food system.

By the end of Step 4, you should have: a set of actionable strategies that address identified power asymmetries, clear roles and responsibilities for implementation, and a framework for monitoring and adaptive learning. These outputs ensure that power analysis translates into concrete programmatic and policy change.

- **Key Questions to be Answered during this Step**

1. **Which power dynamics identified in Step 3 are most feasible and impactful to address to accelerate change?**
Where can FPI and partners realistically intervene?
2. **Which actors can serve as allies, champions, or brokers,** and which actors may resist?
What engagement strategies are appropriate for each?
3. **What actions could shift power,** either directly (e.g., opening decision spaces, strengthening voice) or indirectly (e.g., reframing narratives)?
4. **How will the strategy be monitored and adapted,** given that power dynamics change over time?
What early signals or indicators should be tracked?

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) – Strategy & Action Design Framework

A practical approach for tackling complex problems by breaking them into smaller, solvable components and testing small, feasible actions. Useful when political space is uncertain or shifting. Helps teams identify realistic entry points and adapt strategies as conditions evolve.

- Purpose: Helps teams design politically feasible strategies by breaking complex problems into solvable components, identifying entry points, and iterating solutions.
- Use-Case for step 4:
 - Break down each identified power asymmetry into root causes and sub-issues
 - Identify feasible entry points where the team can act now
 - Develop small, iterative experiments to navigate power dynamics

Source: Harvard CID PDIA Toolkit. <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/>

“Theory of Change for Power Shifts” (CARE / Just Associates)

A structured way to articulate how specific actions are expected to contribute to shifts in visible, hidden or invisible power. Helps clarify assumptions, priority actors, and expected pathways of change. Supports teams to link short-term interventions with longer-term transformation.

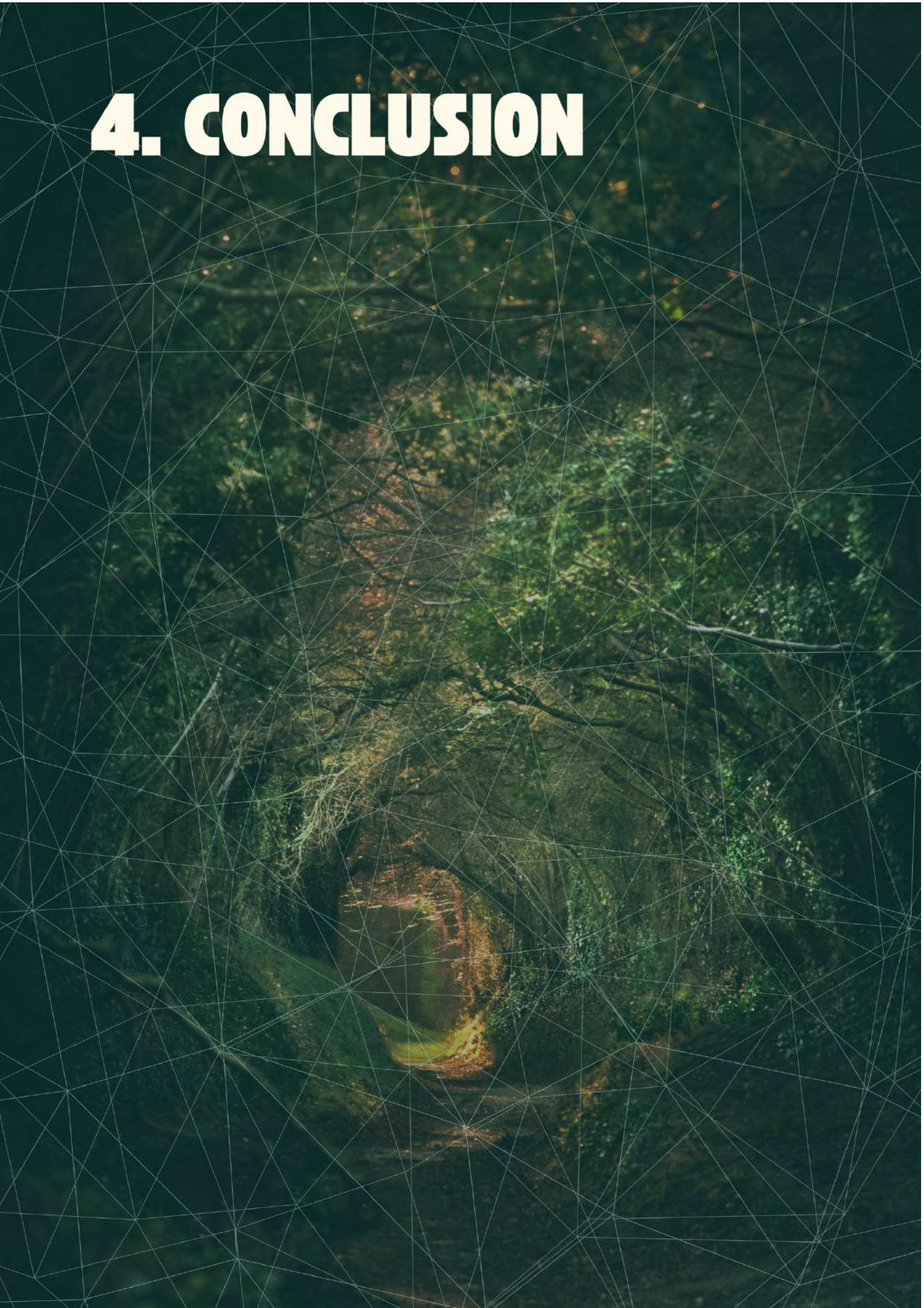
- Purpose: Provides structured guidance on designing strategies that shift power relations—rather than just deliver activities—through evidence-based pathways of change.
- Use-Case for step 4:
 - Translate power asymmetries into change pathways
 - Identify which forms of power need to shift (visible, hidden, invisible)
 - Map how alliances, narrative shifts, or governance reforms contribute to long-term power rebalancing

Outcome Mapping (IDRC)

A method focused on the behaviours and practices of key actors who influence change. Helps teams identify “boundary partners” and track small but meaningful shifts in how they act or collaborate. Well suited for contexts where change depends on relationships, incentives and gradual influence.

- Purpose: Supports planning and reflection focused on behaviour change among key actors and networks—often essential when navigating complex political incentives.
- Use-Case for step 4:
 - Identify priority stakeholders whose behaviour must shift
 - Define “boundary partners” (actors you can influence)
 - Track progress through incremental behavioral changes rather than fixed outputs

4. CONCLUSION



Power mapping is an illuminating process—it shines a light on the hidden corners and structural biases that technical analyses alone might miss. By following this methodology, UNDP country teams and their partners will gain a nuanced understanding of “who holds power, how they wield it, and how that influences food system outcomes.” This understanding is not an academic exercise; it is a practical guide for where and how to intervene. As noted, evidence and rational arguments alone often fail to advance food systems transformation when power asymmetries are blocking change. Hence, incorporating power analysis helps to craft initiatives that are politically smart and socially inclusive.

The *Food & Power* Initiative recognizes that addressing power dynamics is challenging—those benefiting from the status quo may resist change. However, it also highlights opportunities: there are always entry points where strategic action can make a difference, whether it’s building a broad coalition for change, empowering local communities with information (thus shifting invisible power), or negotiating reforms that align incentives for powerful actors with public goals.

Power is not monolithic; it can be challenged and reconfigured. Successful examples from elsewhere (as documented in global case studies) show that with persistence, creativity, and collective effort, seemingly entrenched power relations *can* shift—resulting in more equitable and resilient food systems.

This guidance note provided a structured approach, complete with frameworks (like Gaventa’s Power Cube), tools (stakeholder matrices, network maps), and templates to carry out a power mapping. In practice, the methodology should be applied with humility and adaptation to local context. Every country will have unique historical, cultural, and political nuances to its power landscape. The annexes offer editable tables and diagram formats to be customized – they are starting points, not final products.

As the team embarks on power mapping, keep in mind the principles of participation, inclusion, and equity. Make the process itself empowering—involve those who are usually left out, so that the mapping is not just about them but with them. This will increase the legitimacy and uptake of the findings. And finally, approach the task with an open mind and curiosity. Power analyses often challenge assumptions and reveal surprises about how things really work. Embrace these insights, as they are the key to unlocking transformative change.

In conclusion, the Power Mapping Methodology for FPI is a critical tool in the journey toward sustainable, equitable, and power-balanced food systems. By using this methodology, countries will be better equipped to navigate the political currents of change and steer collective action toward the vision of food systems that truly leave no one behind.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Stakeholder Mapping Matrix Template

An editable table for mapping stakeholders, their attributes, and their influence. Country teams should list all major stakeholders in the food system and fill in relevant details. Adapt categories as needed.

Stakeholder / Group	Type / Sector	Main Interests or Goals	Level (Local/Provincial/National/Global)	Influence on Food System (High/Medium/Low)	Current Stance (Supportive/Neutral/Opposed)
[Name of Stakeholder 1]	[e.g. Government ministry, Farmer org, Private company, NGO, etc.]	[e.g. Increase exports, improve livelihoods, profit, food safety...]	[Level of operation/impact]	[H/M/L]	[Supports or opposes key changes?]
[Name of Stakeholder 2]	[Type]	[Interests]	[Level]	[H/M/L]	[Stance]
[Name of Stakeholder 2]	[Type]	[Interests]	[Level]	[H/M/L]	[Stance]

(The matrix can be expanded as needed. It is often useful to group stakeholders by category for clarity. After filling this, teams proceed to plotting on Power-Interest grid or other analyses.)

Annex 2: Power Dynamics Analysis Template

This template helps summarize the findings on power dynamics across different forms/dimensions. It can be used as a worksheet during Step 3.

A. Four Dimensions of Power (Just Associates framework): Identify key observations for each. For each dimension, list the relevant dynamics or examples from the country context.

- **Visible Power:** (e.g., formal institutions and laws – who officially decides what? Notable visible power dynamics such as a particular ministry’s dominance, or existence of pro-poor legislation, etc.)
- *Example:* Parliament passes agriculture budgets with little input from small farmers, reflecting top-down visible power.
- **Hidden Power:** (e.g., agenda control, behind-the-scenes influence, corruption, gatekeepers—what issues or groups are kept out of decision-making?)
- *Example:* Large food corporations via industry associations quietly lobby to block regulations on sugar content; no civil society present in those agenda-setting conversations.
- **Invisible Power:** (e.g., cultural norms, public beliefs, media narratives that shape the discourse and people’s self-image—what “unspoken rules” or mindsets influence the food system?)
- *Example:* Social norm that farming is a “man’s domain” discourages women from leadership roles in cooperatives (limiting women’s influence without any formal rule against it).
- **Systemic Power:** (e.g., structural factors like neoliberal market logics, historical marginalization, structural racism, patriarchy—broad systems that underpin the above.)
- *Example:* Historic land tenure systems favour elites (colonial-era plantations became large agribusiness estates), creating a structural barrier for equitable land distribution.

B. Power Cube Mapping: Note key power dynamics by level and space:

- Local Level: [e.g., Traditional councils control water access (visible at local); or local markets dominated by traders cartel (hidden at local)]
- National Level: [e.g., Policy closed space: decisions made by inter-ministerial committee with no external input (closed space, visible power); etc.]
- Global/Regional Level: [e.g., Trade agreements limit policy options (global systemic power); donor priorities shape national agenda (invited space at global influencing national)...]
- Closed Spaces: [Which spaces are closed and to whom?]
- Invited Spaces: [What multi-stakeholder or participatory processes exist? Are they effective or just token?]
- Claimed Spaces: [Independent forums or movements by civil society/communities? E.g., a farmers’ summit that develops its own proposals.]

C. Key Power Asymmetries Summary:

- **Asymmetry 1:** [Describe briefly. Who holds the power vs who is marginalized? Why does it matter for food system outcomes?]
- **Asymmetry 2:** [Describe...]
- **Asymmetry 3:** [...]

(List as many as identified, with short descriptions. These should correspond to the major findings the strategy will address—e.g., “land ownership concentrated”, “policy process exclusive”, “market information monopolized”, etc.)

(This annex serves as a reference for teams to ensure they’ve captured a 360° view of power. It can be included in reports or kept internal.)

Annex 3: Action Plan Template (Integrating Power Strategies)

Key Issue / Power Challenge	Strategy to Address It	Specific Actions	Stakeholders Involved	Timeframe	Indicators of Progress
e.g. Small farmers excluded from policy decisions (Hidden & Visible Power)	Open up policy space for smallholder input. Leverage invited spaces and build farmer org capacity.	- Establish Multi-Stakeholder Platform with farmer representation - Provide training to farmer reps on policy advocacy - Support policy reform mandating consultation in drafting laws	Lead: Ministry of Agriculture; Support: Farmer Federation, UNDP governance advisor, NGO partners	Q1-Q4 2026 (platform setup by Q2; first policy input session by Q4)	- Platform formed and meets regularly - # of smallholder reps contributing to policy drafts - Policy process guidelines amended to require consultations
e.g. Market cartel controls prices (Hidden Power)	Increase market transparency and competition.	- Implement market price information system via SMS for farmers - Advocate for enforcing antitrust regulations with Competition Commission	Lead: Trade Commission; Support: ICT Ministry, Telecom companies, Media	2026-2027	- Info system operational (# of users) - Investigation launched into cartel practices
e.g. Women lack land rights (Invisible & Systemic Power)	Empower women and reform land policies.	- Legal aid program for women's land claims - Gender-sensitivity training for land officials - Support review of land law for gender bias	Lead: Ministry of Land / Gender; Support: Women's networks, Legal NGOs, UNDP gender expert	2026 (pilot in 3 districts), law review by 2027	- # of women assisted and obtaining land titles - New land policy drafted with gender provisions

This template helps translate the power analysis into a concrete action plan or workplan. It can be used to organize Step 4 outputs.



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