

Evaluating Agri-Food Systems Transformation Policies and Regulations

Summary of the EvalforEarth Online Discussion

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Transforming agrifood systems so they are more sustainable, resilient, and equitable is an urgent global priority. To gather insights from the **EvalforEarth** community, **Dr. Mireille Totobesola**, an expert in sustainable agrifood systems, value chains, and climatesmart agriculture, raised a discussion on this critical topic.

BACKGROUND

Policies and regulations play a crucial role in shaping agrifood systems by setting standards, providing incentives, and ensuring sustainability. Well-designed policies can drive innovation, improve food safety, and support smallholder farmers, while ineffective regulations may hinder progress. Evaluating these policies is essential to assess their effectiveness, identify gaps, and refine strategies to meet food security, sustainability, and economic inclusivity goals. Effective policy evaluation uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, including impact assessments, stakeholder consultations, and data analysis, to guide evidence-based decisions. Case studies such as the European Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and Ethiopia's food systems transformation emphasize the importance of policy coherence, stakeholder involvement, and robust monitoring frameworks, highlighting the need for evaluations that assess regulatory effectiveness, identify unintended consequences, and align with sustainable development goals.

The discussion aimed to identify gaps and opportunities in the evaluation of policies impacting agri-food systems, particularly with respect to ensuring the inclusion and welfare of smallholder farmers and target populations in diverse contexts, as well as more generally. The goal is to co-create actionable recommendations that will guide future policy evaluations in transforming agri-food systems, fostering a comprehensive understanding of how these policies impact all stakeholders, both positively and negatively.



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Discussion points included aspects relating to:

1. Evaluation of results and impacts:

How can we effectively assess whether new agri-food policies achieve their intended outcomes, and what indicators and methodologies can capture both short-term results and long-term impacts? Additionally, how can evaluation results be better used to inform policymaking and regulatory reforms?

2. Effectiveness of regulatory frameworks:

What factors influence the success or failure of regulatory frameworks such as EUDR, and how can evaluations ensure these frameworks are adaptable, inclusive, and equitable?

3. Cross-learning from case studies:

How can we learn from the evaluation of initiatives such as EUDR and Ethiopia's food systems policies, and what role does stakeholder engagement play in policy design and evaluation? Additionally, what challenges arise in evaluating policies and regulations?

The online discussion gathered key contributions from experts, which are summarized below. [The full discussion can be accessed here.](#)

KEY SUBMISSIONS

1. Evaluation of Results and Impacts

Evaluating agri-food system policy and regulations is challenging due to the complexity of global supply chains and varying governance in sourcing regions. Engaging diverse stakeholders and the lack of comprehensive long-term data further complicates assessing the regulation's sustainability and effectiveness.

Regarding indicators and methodologies, a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data (e.g., deforestation rates and agricultural productivity) and qualitative assessments for better understanding can provide a more complete picture of policy impact. Long-term data and context-specific analysis are essential for evaluating both short-term and long-term impacts effectively.

Lack of comprehensive data, particularly long-term data, makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of policies and regulations.

According to Serdar Bayryyev, evaluating EUDR presents challenges in tracing supply chains due to their global complexity, especially for products such as cocoa, which are sourced from regions with varying governance and compliance levels. Bayryyev also stressed that engaging a diverse group of stakeholders (smallholder farmers, businesses and consumers), while necessary, complicates the evaluation process, affecting data quality and applicability.

2. Effectiveness of Regulatory Frameworks

The importance of considering the social and economic welfare of smallholder farmers when evaluating regulatory frameworks such as EUDR and Ethiopia's food systems policies was emphasized.

Mike Mwale's stressed the use of farmer-centric metrics, focusing on smallholders' livelihoods, income stability, and market access to prevent their marginalization. Policies such as EUDR may burden smallholders in developing countries due to high compliance costs, potentially excluding them from global supply chains.

Participatory evaluations involving farmers are essential to ensure appropriate assessment of the true impacts of agri-food policies and regulations on their livelihoods, social and environmental issues at local and community levels. This implies that evaluation approaches and tools should consider the costs and technical and social capacity and ability of smallholders (including men, women, youth and minorities), to effectively participate, ensuring ownership of the outcomes and recommendations that results from the assessment process.

3. Cross-Learning

Contributions emphasized the importance of considering local food culture and the needs of end-users (consumers) when designing and evaluating food systems policies. Food systems should be environmentally sustainable, culturally appropriate, and accessible, meeting dietary needs while minimizing food losses.

Lal Manavado highlighted the need for policy coherence, ensuring harmony between trade, agriculture, and nutrition policies to avoid negative outcomes such as farmer poverty or malnutrition. It was stressed that policies should be informed by local inspections to align with national food security goals, rather than rely on one-size-fits-all solutions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, contributions highlighted the need for comprehensive evaluations of agricultural and food systems policies that extend beyond economic indicators to include social and environmental considerations, particularly their impact on smallholder farmers. The discussion emphasized the importance of adopting inclusive evaluation methods, such as participatory evaluations, and ensuring policy coherence to achieve agri-food system transformation goals while avoiding unintended negative consequences.

The necessity of developing or adapting evaluation methodologies tailored to specific contexts, sectors, and cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality and nutrition. A systemic approach is essential to capture the complexities and interlinkages of all relevant factors, including possible trade-offs of policies and regulations to ensure that they are efficient, transformative, and context specific. In order to do so efficiently, Mireille highlighted the importance of a common understanding of key leverage points in food systems transformation for policy and regulations development and implementation. To make meaningful progress, action must be taken on these leverage points and the impact of policies through agreed-upon indicators should be measured. This is crucial at national, regional and global levels, where the complexity of the interlinked systems, such as trade, infrastructure, energy, and governance, must be considered.

Building national and institutional capacity through targeted training for stakeholders, including smallholder producers, extension service agents, NGOs, and agricultural senior staff, is crucial for ensuring effective use of these methodologies. The training should be well-designed and piloted to accommodate the varying capacities of different stakeholders, allowing them to engage effectively and apply tools in a way that aligns with their specific needs, constraints, and expertise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere thanks to all participants and members of EvalForward—now **EvalforEarth**—for their active engagement in this insightful online discussion.

Special appreciation goes to **Dr. Mireille Totobesola**, who initiated and contributed significantly to the discussion.

The contributions, experiences, and resources shared by community members and invited experts have been invaluable in advancing our understanding of the evaluation of policies and regulations driving sustainable and equitable agri-food systems transformation.

Discussion moderation, contributions curation, and collation: *Dr. Mireille Totobesola and Innocent Chamisa* (EvalforEarth).

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

International Food Policy Research Institute. 2021. *2021 Global Food Policy Report: Transforming Food Systems after COVID-19*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896293991>

van Berkum, S., Dengerink, J., & Ruben, R. (2018). *The food systems approach: sustainable solutions for a sufficient supply of healthy food*. (Wageningen Economic Research memorandum; No. 2018-064). Wageningen Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.18174/451505>

CGIAR GENDER Platform. (15 October 2021). *Cultivating Equality: Advancing Gender Research in Agriculture and Food Systems—Daily Update* [Conference presentation]. Cultivating Gender Equality Conference. Nairobi, Kenya. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/116960>

The Information System of the Deforestation Regulation as set out in Art. 33 was launched on 4 December 2024. Registration for users of the system was opened on November 2024.

Publications

- Regulation on Deforestation-free products-European Commission
- Briefing notes on sourcing of deforestation-free commodities
- Factsheet on the Commission proposal for a Regulation
- EU Deforestation Regulation: an opportunity for smallholders
- Proposal for a Regulation amending Deforestation Regulation as regards the date of application
- Communication from the Commission on a Strategic Framework for International Cooperation Engagement on Deforestation
- Règlement européen contre la déforestation et la dégradation des forêts - Stratégie nationale de lutte contre la déforestation importée

Impact Assessment: Minimizing the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with products placed on the EU market:

- Executive Summary of the Staff Working Document on the Impact Assessment
- Staff Working Document on the Impact Assessment
- Public consultation on Deforestation and forest degradation—reducing the impact of products placed on the EU market
- Synopsis Report of Stakeholder Consultation as part of the Impact Assessment on demand-side measures to address deforestation
- Consultancy Report on Impact Assessment on demand-side measures to address deforestation

Reference for the Ethiopian case:

- Policy Coherence in the Ethiopian Food Systems Transformation Effort