



World Food
Programme

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Food Systems in Tanzania

Investing in Distribution
to Trigger Systemic Change

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Contents

Acknowledgement.....	2
List of Figures.....	3
List of Tables	4
Executive summary	5
1. Overview of the project	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Research method	10
1.3 Analysis	11
2. Setting the Context: Food Systems in Tanzania.....	13
2.1 Overview.....	13
2.2 Land productivity challenges and climate vulnerability	14
2.3 Post-harvest and distribution losses, causes and effects	17
2.4 Malnutrition and health impacts.....	28
3. An integrated view at the food systems in Tanzania.....	31
3.1 Identification of the main drivers of change.....	31
3.2 Main dynamics emerging over time and required actions	33
4. Quantitative analysis.....	37
4.1 Scenario definition	37
4.2 Results	38
5. Policy insights	41
6. Conclusions	43
References	45
Annex 1: CBA assumptions	45
Model structure: production.....	48
Model structure: distribution.....	48
Annex 2: model description	48
Scenario 1: improved production.....	50
Annex 3: detailed model results	50
Scenario 2: improved distribution.....	60
Scenario 3: jigher demand for nutritious food (awareness raising)	71
Scenario 4: improved production, distribution and efforts for awareness raising.....	82
Bibliography	92

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Hotspot areas of different levels of land degradation in Tanzania (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2018)	13
Figure 2: Agricultural areas in Tanzania – 2019 LULC map.....	20
Figure 3: Buffer of 1.3 km around primary roads (left), and agricultural areas within the buffer (right)	20
Figure 4: Buffer of 1.3 km around primary and secondary roads (left), and agricultural areas within the buffer (right).....	21
Figure 5: Buffer of 1.3 km around primary, secondary, and tertiary roads (left), and agricultural areas within the buffer (right).....	21
Figure 6: import and distribution markups in fertilizer prices in Tanzania (Goedde, Ooko-Ombaka, & Pais, 2019).....	24
Figure 7: Stunting in Tanzania (WFP, 2021b)	26
Figure 8: Calorie shares by food group for mainland Tanzania (Cochrane & D'Souza, 2015).....	27
Figure 9: Full Causal Loop Diagram (CLD), June 15 session. Intervention options are presented in orange; external drivers in red.	32
Figure 10: Thematic areas included in the full CLD (June 15 session), including production, distribution, consumption and infrastructure (food storage and roads).	33
Figure 11: Total crop production BAU and improved production scenario	47
Figure 12: Average time to market BAU and improved production scenario	49
Figure 13: Total profits from crop production BAU and improved production scenario	54
Figure 14: Total crop production BAU and improved distribution scenario	57
Figure 15: Average time to market BAU and improved distribution scenario	59
Figure 16: Total profits from crop production BAU and improved distribution scenario	64
Figure 17: Total crop production BAU and consumer awareness scenario	67
Figure 18: Average time to market BAU and consumer awareness scenario	69
Figure 19: Total profits from crop production BAU and consumer awareness scenario	73
Figure 20: Total crop production BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	75
Figure 21: Average time to market BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	77
Figure 22: Total profits from crop production BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	82

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Drivers and indicators of land degradation in hotspot areas (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2018)	14
Table 2: Data portrait of smallholder farms in Tanzania (FAO, 2018).	16
Table 3: Road Condition by Pavement Type (TANROADS, 2021)	18
Table 4: Number of agricultural areas (m2) within selected buffers.....	21
Table 5: Overview of scenarios	34
Table 6: Overview of scenario impacts on key model indicators for all scenarios relative to the BAU scenario	35
Table 7: Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) comparing the economic performance of alternative scenarios in comparison with the BAU. Cumulative values up to 2050	37
Table 8: Macronutrients, vitamins, minerals and amino acids considered for the food consumption module.....	46
Table 9: Overview of assumptions improved production scenario.....	47
Table 10: Shares of land used by crop BAU and improved production scenario	48
Table 11: Produce lost during distribution BAU and improved production scenario	49
Table 12: Relative product quality BAU and improved production scenario	50
Table 13: Produce shares in the average per capita diet by type of produce BAU and improved production scenario	50
Table 14: Nutrient sufficiency per capita indicators BAU and improved production scenario.....	54
Table 15: Average profits per ton of produce sold BAU and improved production scenario.....	55
Table 16: Overview of policy assumptions for the improved distribution scenario.....	57
Table 17: Shares of land used by crop BAU and improved distribution scenario	58
Table 18: Produce lost during distribution BAU and improved distribution scenario	59
Table 19: Relative product quality BAU and improved distribution scenario	60
Table 20: Produce shares in the average per capita diet by type of produce BAU and improved distribution scenario	61
Table 21: Nutrient sufficiency per capita indicators BAU and improved distribution scenario.....	64
Table 22: Average profits per ton of produce sold BAU and improved distribution scenario.....	65
Table 23: Overview of assumptions for the consumer awareness scenario.....	66
Table 24: Shares of land used by crop BAU and consumer awareness scenario.....	68
Table 25: Produce lost during distribution BAU and consumer awareness scenario.....	68
Table 26: Relative product quality BAU and consumer awareness scenario	69
Table 27: Produce shares in the average per capita diet by type of produce BAU and consumer awareness scenario	70
Table 28: Nutrient sufficiency per capita indicators BAU and consumer awareness scenario.....	73
Table 29: Average profits per ton of produce sold BAU and consumer awareness scenario.....	75
Table 30: Shares of land used by crop BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	76
Table 31: Produce lost during distribution BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	77
Table 32: Relative product quality BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	78
Table 33: Produce shares in the average per capita diet by type of produce BAU and integrated supply chain scenario	79
Table 34: Nutrient sufficiency per capita indicators BAU and integrated supply chain scenario.....	82
Table 35: Average profits per ton of produce sold BAU and integrated supply chain scenario.....	83

Executive summary

Food system challenges in Tanzania are among the root causes of food insecurity and hunger, with implications for food production, processing, distribution and consumption. Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked, value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and those parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments within which they are embedded.

There are many food system challenges in Tanzania and within the greater sub-region that impact on food- and nutrition-security outcomes and influence the opportunities for improved production and demand.

Overall, the main impacts of an inefficient food system include:

- a. low profitability** for producers, due to the poor quality and/or quantity of products sold;
- b. limited food availability**, especially for fresh and nutritious foods, affecting food availability, affordability and access; and
- c. increased pressure on the environment**, due to the inefficient use of already scarce production inputs (e.g. water) and continued land conversion at the expense of fragile ecosystems.

The **current challenges prevent the attainment of a sustainable food system that: supports viable livelihoods** (corresponding to **a** above); **provides adequate and affordable nutrition** (corresponding to **b** above); and **protects natural resources and minimizes climate and environmental impact** (corresponding to **c** above).

This study analyses the Tanzanian food system, and specifically food distribution, where the latter enables investment in sustainable production and improves food security and nutritional outcomes.¹ We define food systems here with reference to the food value-chain in its totality, taking into account all the elements, their relationships and the related effects for a multitude of economic actors. We consider all relevant causal variables of a problem and all social, environmental and economic impacts of the solutions to achieve transformational, systemic changes. Similarly, in accordance with the definition of food systems, food distribution is analysed with a clear understanding that, due to the integrated nature of food systems, focusing on how food is made accessible in the Tanzanian context will necessarily highlight connections to other areas, such as food production and consumption.

This aligns with the process and outcomes of “Pathways for sustainable food systems 2030” (“Pathways”), a project carried out in 2020 and 2021 by the Government of Tanzania. The six areas of focus highlighted in the “Pathways” analysis are interconnected in our assessment. We find from our qualitative and quantitative data that **investments in food distribution have the potential to increase profits and enable further financing** (item 2 in “Pathways”) to strengthen production (item 1), which results in higher availa-

The starting point is a food system that presents challenges for:



Production

with low soil productivity due to lack of knowledge, poor access to infrastructure and investment that is limited by low profitability



Distribution

with a large number of losses due to the lack of aggregation, missing cold storage and refrigerated vehicles, and long travel times due to poor road infrastructure



Nutrition

with persistent issues of malnutrition, underpinned by the high cost and comparatively lower desirability of nutritious diets

¹ This report also includes scenarios that consider aggregation and processing.

bility of nutritious food (item 3), and the use of more climate-resilient infrastructure (item 4). The overall outcome is a food system that is more resilient to economic fluctuations, trade dynamics and climate change (item 5).²

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this study, to first map and conceptualize the complexity of the food system in Tanzania, and then to quantify the likely impacts of scenarios of action and inaction. System dynamics modelling, the approach chosen for this study, is a methodology that allows the capture of many socio-economic and environmental links of production, distribution and consumption, and highlights the long-term impact of policy and programming decisions on the food system. It also allows us to estimate, analyse and present physical results alongside a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for each scenario.

Our analysis suggests that using an integrated approach to food systems leads to the greatest gains, in terms of profitability for farmers, nutritional outcomes and efficiency in the use of production inputs (see Table ES1). While our analysis shows that investments in production, distribution and consumption are all economically viable, we find that while investing in production or consumption alone can generate

benefits, it does not lead to a transformation of the market and does not trigger virtuous, self-sustaining, systemic dynamics. Specifically, investment in improved access to infrastructure, adequate storage and transport infrastructure results in lower distribution losses, while at the same time ensuring that high-quality, fresh produce reaches the market at affordable prices. This in turn leads to a change in consumer behaviour towards higher consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, which in turn leads to a change in the composition of crops grown, stimulated by higher demand and profitability. Practically, investment in food distribution infrastructure triggers many of the ‘game changers’ listed in “Pathways”, by generating this systemic change.

Table ES1: Overview of scenario impacts on key model indicators for all scenarios relative to the BAU scenario

Indicator	Scenario results compared to business as usual (BAU)			
	Improved production	Improved distribution	Consumer awareness	Full integration
Total production	↑	→	→	↑
Crop diversification	↑	→	↑	↑
Distribution losses	↻	↓	→	↓
Product quality	→	↑	→	↑

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