

Workshop report

Platforms for healthier Diets in Vietnam

Date: November 8, 2018

Location: Hanoi Hotel, D8 Giang Vo, Ba Dinh District, Hanoi

Authors: Sanne Bakker, Marion Herens



Led by IFPRI



On November 8, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI), together with CIAT Vietnam, organized a workshop in Hanoi, as part of IFPRI's program Food Systems for Healthier Diets (FSHD), to share and validate findings of a study on multi-stakeholder collaboration on food systems for healthier diets in Bangladesh and Nigeria, Vietnam and Ethiopia. The aim of the study was to better understand what collaborations, or platforms, already exist, how they are organized and function; who the key players are, and what role platforms might play in food system transformations. Workshop participants were professionals actively involved in the platforms identified to get a better understanding of platform dynamics (see Annex 1 for the list of participants). This report summarizes the research findings as presented in the workshop and the key lessons and conclusions from the discussions that followed.

Background

Understanding where and how to intervene in transforming food systems to ensure access to healthy diets is a goal of considerable size, and unlikely to be accomplished by one organization alone. It requires active networking between multiple stakeholders, engaged in different parts of the food system. Researchers from WCIDI explored multi-stakeholder collaborations on food systems in Bangladesh and Nigeria, Vietnam and Ethiopia. The aim of the study was to better understand which collaborations, or platforms, already existed in FSHD focal countries; and how they were organized.

Identifying platforms

A literature review was done on existing definitions and roles of platforms and their results, and on the definition of healthier diets. Based on the generated overview of concepts and definitions from the literature, key identifiers and descriptors for 'platforms' and 'healthy diets' were defined. For healthy diets, the definition of **diet quality** was used. Diet quality is central to healthy diets and encompasses aspects of both *adequacy* (getting enough of desirable foods or food groups, energy, macro-

The Food Systems for Healthier Diets research program (FSHD), part of IFPRI's Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) program, aims to ensure that agricultural practices, interventions, and policies will maximize health and nutrition benefits, while reducing health risks, using a food systems approach. Inclusive and sustainable food systems should guarantee consumers availability of, equitable access to and efficient delivery of safe and healthy food requiring interconnectedness between agro-food systems and other (health, education) systems. The study on Platforms for Healthier Diets, conducted by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI) is an effort to trace forms of interconnectedness and to explore the role of platforms as mechanisms for strengthening food system transformations for healthier diets.

WCIDI has built an extensive international track record on working on processes of innovation and change through facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP), brokering knowledge, management for impact, and supporting capacity development.

and micronutrients) and *moderation* (restriction of unwanted foods, food components or nutrients such as fat, sugar, sugar-sweetened beverages, and sodium).

Key identifiers for platforms were then defined, serving as an analytical framework for platform identification, i.e.: *shared aim*, or common goal, of the platform; *structure* or organisational forms of the platform; *urgency*, or underlying motive to form a platform; *functionality*, or predominant activities of the platform; and *linkages* across scales.

A desk- and web-based review of platform initiatives at CGIAR level, and at country level was conducted, including platform composition, mechanisms of functioning and identification of international and national linkages.

Next, **network mapping** was done (using NodeXL sheets and Gephi software) to visualise platforms, clustering organisations and key connectors or bridging actors with multiple memberships.

Platforms in Vietnam

In Vietnam, **16 platforms** were identified through the web-based scan, out of which 7 CGAIR related (CIAT Elucidating Pathways from Agrobiodiversity to Dietary Diversity, FoodSTART+, CIAT Breeding better crops, A4NH, SPEAR, Common Microbial Biotechnology Platform, and MALICA). Figure 1 shows the network of platforms and their membership size based on the outcomes of the web-based scan. The findings of the web-based scan were validated with the audience, which added 9 relevant platforms (Platform for Agricultural Sustainability in Vietnam (PASV), Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (SANV) working group, Nutritional Human Resources Pool, the Agriculture Coalition (AC), National Nutritional Resource Association of Vietnam, and the Vietnam National Home Garden Association, and the Zero hunger challenge steering board).

Figure 2 presents the platform initiatives in connection to members. Major clusters seem to be the Food safety working group and the Technical working group on nutrition and the major connectors seem to be CIAT, MoRD, NIN, FAO and UNICEF.

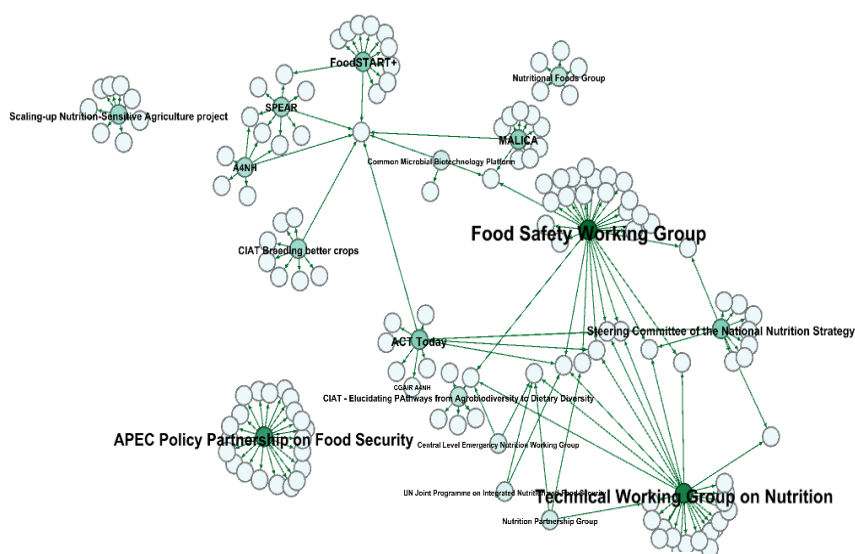


Figure 1 Platform mapping Vietnam

A number of organizations are a member of multiple clusters, dubbed 'connectors'. While the connection between a platform and a member does not say whether this member organisation is particularly active or influential, it is relevant to see which organisations could form the linkage with other platforms. In theory, such organisations with multiple memberships thus form a key 'connector' and may pass on information between these clusters. Yet, the platforms often do *not* subscribe to the full definition of 'multi-stakeholder platforms' or fully focus on the definition of 'healthy diets', as explained earlier.

The concept of healthy diets, as such, is not yet a dominant concept in the discourse on nutrition and food systems in Vietnam, neither in the other FSHD focus countries. Using a web-based scan presented limitations and challenges to the research. E.g. information required for the platform analysis is not often not available online, online information can be outdated or not regularly updated, platforms without a strong online presence might have been overlooked, and it is not possible to capture which members are truly active and contributing to the platform activities.

Key messages of the group discussions

After the presentation of the findings, workshop participants split into smaller groups to discuss

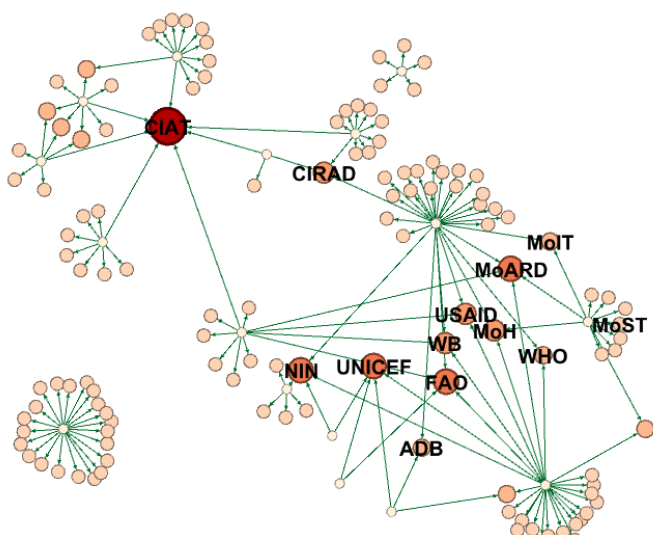


Figure 2 Key connectors between platforms

conditions and bottlenecks for successful functioning of the identified platforms in Vietnam and their contribution to scaling up sustainable food system innovations and anchoring healthy and sustainable diet considerations. Annex 2 provides a summary of the outcomes of these discussions.

Key recommendations

- Define clear strategies and plans of operations for each platform
- Enhance external communication of the platforms to i) increase awareness on the activities of the platforms, ii) increase opportunities for collaboration and iii) avoid duplication of work.
- Move from voluntary commitment to more formalized commitment with clear responsibilities for the platform members
- Use the platforms to connect consumers with producers; consumers are often left out in platforms and or operate as consumer groups in isolation, and the same applies for farmers.
- Identify a lead platform that coordinates the platforms that work towards food systems for healthier diets, starting with a networking event of members of all the platforms.
- Apply the PDCA principle/cycle for the platforms: 1) Plan, 2) Do, 3) Check and 4) Action.
- Use the platform to advocate for healthier diets and promote the food-based dietary guidelines. However, the food based dietary guidelines should be reviewed and updated so they promote a sustainable diet and take into account the environmental impact of the food system.

Mapping Network dynamics

In the second group exercise participants were asked to map out the dynamics of two platforms which, according to the desk study, seem to be major platforms with a high number of (key connecting) members; i) the Food safety working group (FSWG) and ii) Technical working group on nutrition (TWGN). Participants whose organization is a member of the platforms helped to inform the map. The map included i) a list of platform **outputs**, ii) all platform **members** on colored cards classified as core and non-



core members and iii) **flows** of money, information, advice etc. between the platform and other stakeholders in the food system.

It was observed in both mapping exercises that the **private sector**, mainly farmers and retailers, are not well represented in the platforms. There was also scepticism towards inviting the private sector, especially the baby food and dairy industry, due to their conflict of interest. There was consensus that the retailers should be much more involved; they should be provided with information on national standards and enticed to sell nutritious foods. Private sector involvement could also help generate funding for the platform.

Participant also distinguished **core and non-core members**. The core members were defined as those members who are strongly involved in completing the platform outputs and in placed in an inner circle on the map. Non-core members are less committed, share different objectives, contribute less or not to the platform outputs, and whether or not they attend platform



meetings depends on the relevance of the topics on the agenda. Pictures of the outcomes of this exercise can be found in Annex 3. In the inner circles of core members, one would find a combination of the relevant government bodies, e.g. MoH, NIN, NAFIQAS or VFA and large international NGOs, donors or development banks such as UNICEF, FAO, Save the Children, ADB, and World Bank. Participants discussed extensively the **voice of CSOs**, which is often weak in these platforms. CSO were often classified as non-core members. This observation was ascribed to the differences in power, money and influences in other sectors. It was debated whether members with relevant experience with the topic, (should) have a greater voice in the platforms. Apart from

these similarities in platform dynamics for the FSWG and the TWGN, some difference were also reported; the FSWG is relatively young, whereas the TWGN which has been established for four years. The FSWG is working under a relatively new Terms of References (ToR), and has mostly engaged in information sharing so far. The TWGN is better organized and has, for example, contributed to policy reviews, information campaigns and national guidelines.

WCDI and CIAT Vietnam, on behalf of the A4NH program, want to **thank** all the workshop participants for their

active participation and contributions. The results of this workshop will be used by the FSHD research program to build a deeper understanding of platforms as mechanisms in support of food systems transformations for healthier diets. For questions or more information on this study, contact marion.herens@wur.nl / T.T.Duong@cgiar.org

Please cite as

Bakker, S.; Herens, M. (2019) *Platforms for Healthier Diets in Vietnam*. Workshop Report. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen.

Photo credits: Nam Nguyen (CIAT)

Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation
PO Box 88
6700 AA Wageningen
The Netherlands

T +31 317 486 800
F +31 317 486 801
info.cdi@wur.nl
www.wur.eu/cdi

Annex 1 List of participants

Full name	Organization
Truong Tuyet Mai	MOH - National Institute of Nutrition (NIN)
Nguyen Thi Thanh Hai	NOMAFSI
Do Minh Phuong	National Institute of Agricultural Planning and Projection
Nguyen Trung Hieu	National Institute of Agricultural Planning and Projection
Nguyen My Linh	Vietnam Farmers' Union - International Cooperation Department
Pham Thi Hong Linh	Vietnam Farmers' Union - International Cooperation Department
Le Hong Viet	Women Research Center, Vietnam Women's Academy
Tran Van Hoc	Viet Nam Standards and Consumer Association (VINASTAS)
Phung Duc Tung	MDRI
Mr. Hardwick Tchale	WORLDBANK
Nguyen Dinh Quang Do Hong Phuong	UNICEF
Nguyen Anh Vu	World Vision
Nguyen Tran Lam	Rikolto
Doan Thi Thu Huyen	Hanoi Medical University (HMU)
Tran Hai	HUPH
Nguyen Thi Hoang Lan	VNUA - Faculty of Food Science and Technology
Hoang The Ky	Bioversity International (BI), HealthBridge
Nguyen Mai Trang	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Tuyen Huynh	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Thanh Duong	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Pham Thi Mai Huong	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Anniek Hendrik	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Oliver Payton	International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) - Asia
Nguyen Duy Son	WUR

Annex 2 Outcomes discussion on conditions and bottlenecks

The following table summarizes the outcomes of the discussion on “conditions and bottlenecks for successful functioning of the identified platforms in Vietnam and their contribution to scaling up sustainable food system innovations and anchoring healthy and sustainable diet considerations”.

What works?	What does not work?
Using platforms for information sharing	Conflicts of interest within the platform; platform members do not share the same objective
Platform receiving strong support of different ministries	Platforms do not undertake joint fund raising efforts, this also threatens the sustainability of the platforms
NGO involvement in platforms	Platforms have limited influence on government policymaking processes. Results of platform activities are often not communicated to policymakers. Government staff with influence in policymaking is not involved in the platforms, and send less influential staff to platform meetings.
Using platforms to bring many different types of stakeholders together. Especially the recognition and inclusion of NGOs and CSOs in platforms	Limited commitment from the government. Government and policies in Vietnam call for the establishment of (technical) working groups/platforms, but the government’s investment is not consistent. The calls for platforms are also generic and do not guide the development and functioning of the platforms.
The involvement of international organizations. However, the language barrier often hampers communication	The absence of/unclear TOR and Action Plans for platforms. As a result, of the lack of clear objectives of the platforms, the key role of each platform within the network of platforms in Vietnam is difficult to define; therefore, there is a lot of overlap between the platforms.
Platforms having a direct line to the government	Lack of guidance from the government on formation of platform, only generic statements
Role model networks/platforms to learn from	Poor platform leadership, which limits capacity for decisive actions
	The step from information sharing to concrete actions is missing, and there is a low level of follow up on action points or agreements made during meetings
	Media is spreading information on healthy and safe foods, which is not based on scientific evidence. This abjures the efforts of platforms for healthier diets to inform consumers correctly.
	Platforms are not involved in monitoring the implementation of policies that should promote food systems for healthier diets
<i>Specifically on the role of platforms in changing the narrative from reducing malnutrition to healthier diets;</i>	
Many activities leading the change of discourse from reducing malnutrition to healthier diets have already been implemented in Vietnam but in small scale (e.g. by NGOs and development partners)	Healthier diets are not high on agenda of platforms as there is a lack of awareness among stakeholder on healthier diets and foods systems
Ample evidence on the link between diet and non-communicable diseases and obesity exists	Platforms are not collaborating for joint advocacy for food systems for healthier diets
Vietnam has its own food –based dietary guidelines to support the transition to discourse on food systems for healthier diets	Poor (inter)sectoral collaboration within platforms, limiting joint advocacy
	Current focus of individual members of the platforms is still on reducing malnutrition
	Relevant initiative remain at small scale or pilot projects

Annex 3 Outcomes mapping network dynamics



Figure 3 Network dynamics of the Food safety working group

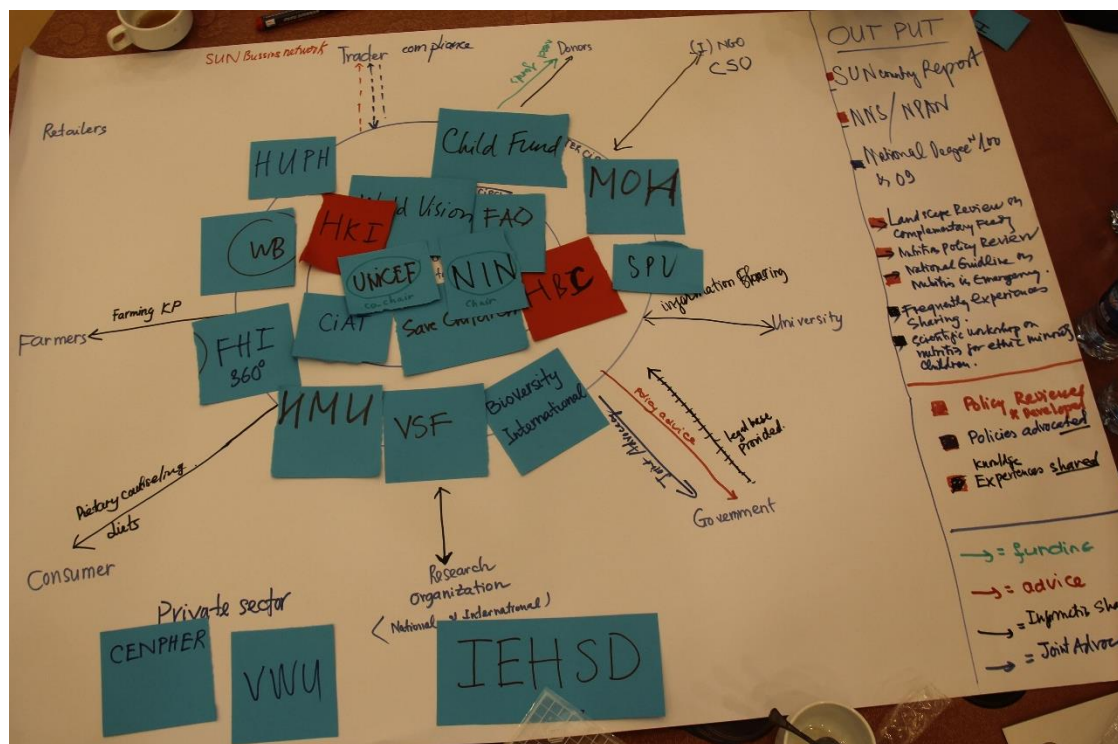


Figure 4 Network dynamics of the Technical working group on nutrition