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Strategising Bangladesh food futures towards healthy and safe food for all

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Increasingly, people are moving into cities and, worldwide, megacities are developing in deltas. This is also the case in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta in Bangladesh, with its capital Dhaka as a mega-city. The large number of people concentrated in the city puts pressure on its livelihood and requires increasing availability of fresh and nutritious food.

Besides changing food patterns, less space for agriculture and increased risks due to flooding, droughts, salinity and climate change make agriculture challenging both in rural and peri-urban areas. These rural and urban developments affect the way in which the food system is organised, for example, and where food is produced, transported, processed and what food is being consumed. In addition, these developments emphasise the importance of rural-urban flows of goods, services and capital and the role they play in a food system.¹

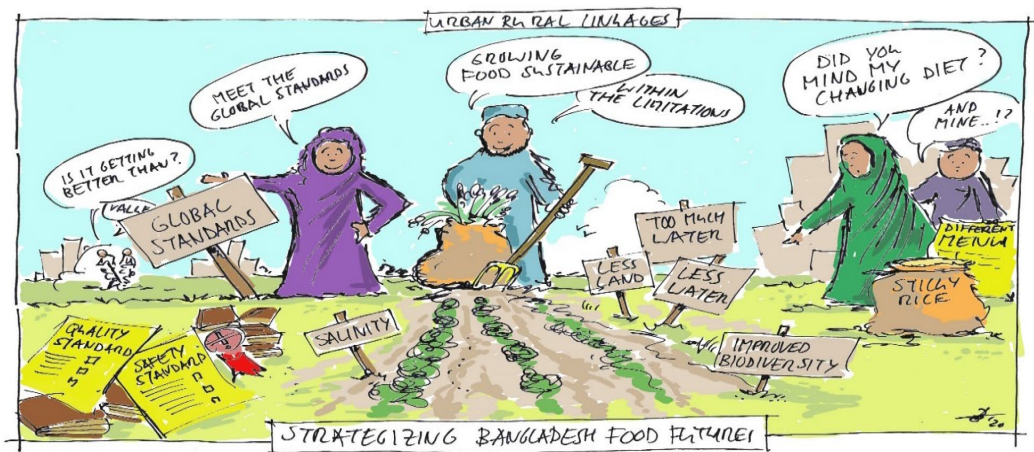
Against this background, it is crucial to connect research of Wageningen University & Research with actual developments in the field, link with various partners and initiatives, and find answers together. In this way we can meaningfully contribute to complex transformation processes. During two online consultation sessions, Wageningen University & Research connected with partners in their network, working towards zero hunger in Bangladesh.

Our main objective is to identify together learning questions around rural-urban linkages in food systems in Bangladesh that are relevant to stakeholders in the food system.

Strategising Bangladesh food futures gathered a mixed group of stakeholders around the virtual table, with representatives from policy makers, private sector, technical assistance and knowledge partners, each working on different parts of the Bangladesh food system. At Wageningen University and Research, food systems are investigated as part of the KB programme 'Food Security and Valuing Water' which aims to deliver an analytical framework, recommendations and tools for food system transition pathways. The two projects 'Deltas under Pressure' and 'Feeding Cities and Migration Settlements', are contributing to the food system transitions in Bangladesh. This is done in close collaboration with partner organisations in Bangladesh.

Who are we in the food system? Click [here](#) to find out.

¹ A food systems approach (FSA) is an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for research and policy aimed at sustainable solutions for the sufficient supply of healthy food. An FSA analyses the relationships between the different parts of the food system and the outcomes of activities within the system in socio-economic and environmental/climate terms (van Berkum et al., 2018).



Credit: Bertram de Rooij

What do we do already?

Exchange and learn: what are the areas of work of the participating partners concerning rural-urban linkages in the Bangladesh food system?

- **Training farmers** to grow safe, fresh vegetables (including tomatoes), use fewer pesticides and adoption of climate-smart agriculture
- Providing advice to farmers, supporting entrepreneurship, producing high-value crops, providing **market information**, offering nutrition security and making facilities in rural areas
- Analysing the **food value chain**, supply and demand of crops, and access to inputs and services for farmers
- **Linking** farmers in the coastal landscape with the urban markets
- Collecting data on household **nutrition** status, dietary gaps, and assessing **Dhaka's city region food system**, to increase understanding of city corporations, wet markets, food waste management, food safety
- Connecting **livestock** production systems in Bangladesh to manure management, salinity and water management
- Implementing Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, and integrating, larger-scale **policy plans** in place
- Analysing **river basins** and catchments covering both rural and urban areas
- Assessing the **food production** system, including water use, land-use change and on-going salination

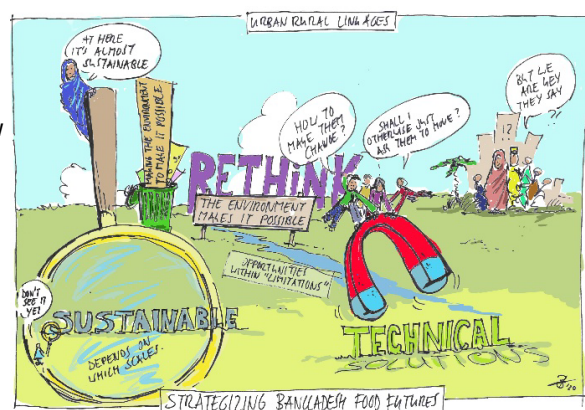


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What are we not yet doing? – finding the gaps

Overview of knowledge gaps: issues that deserve more attention according to participating partners:

- **Missing information** on what to produce and how to ensure a fair price to growers while also making nutritious food affordable for (underprivileged) consumers. Farmers have difficulties finding the market
- **Strengthening the value chain** and ensuring safe food for (urban) consumers
- Involving **younger generations** to reduce unemployment

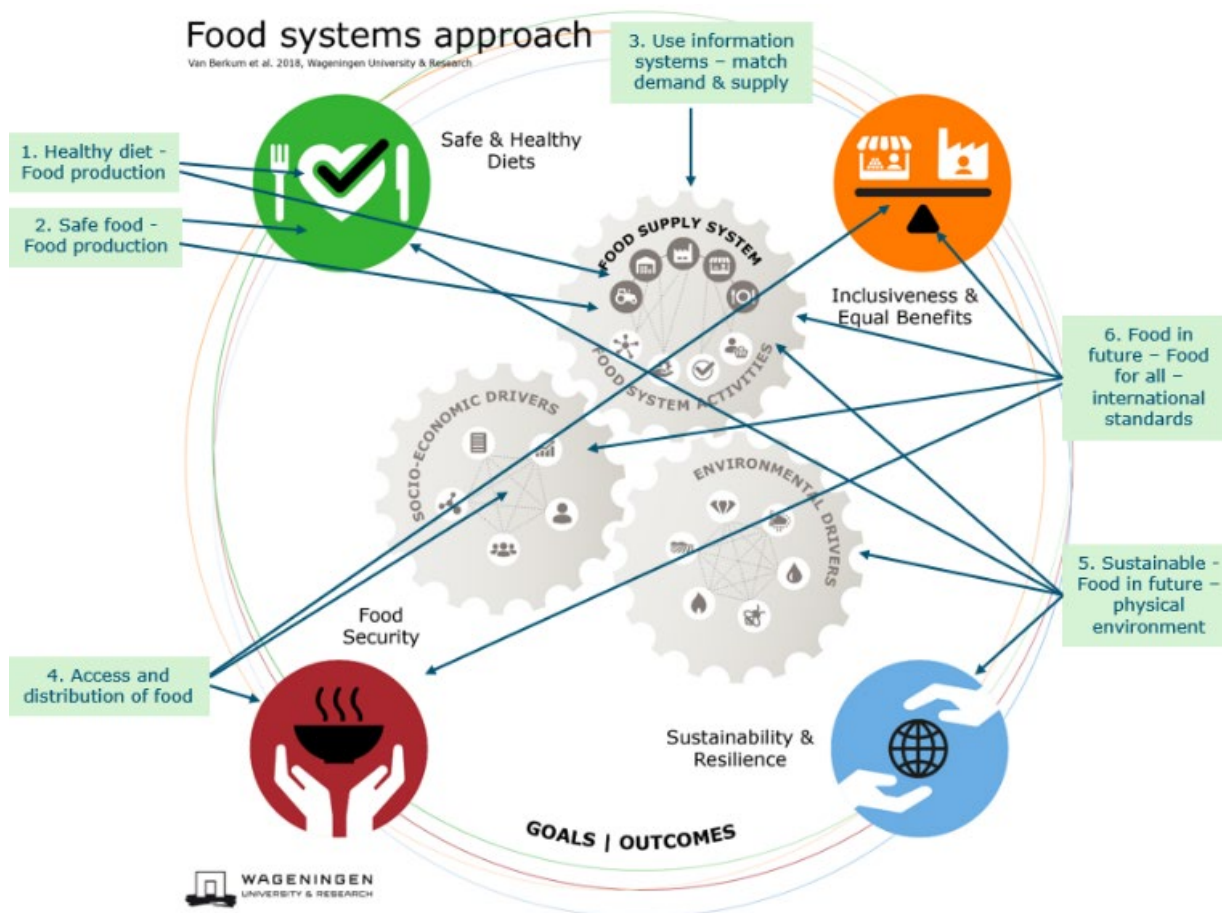


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- Supporting government capacity to **assess risks** for farmers using land
- Assessing the **trade-offs** between producing food and impact on the environment: including water use, water quality and use of agrochemicals
- Highlighting the role of public and private sector stakeholders
- Preventing and reducing of **food loss and waste**
- Developing a **policy framework** to enable the urban-rural linkages are addressed in a more systemic way

Emerging knowledge questions

Back to the Food System Approach: How are these questions related to drivers, food activities, and outcomes?



1. How will **diets change** (rural and urban), and how can we produce food accordingly?
2. How do we ensure **food safety** in the value chain and according to which standards?
3. How could we use information in making marketing mechanisms work better? How can we **match demand and supply**?
4. How could rural and urban stakeholders **access and distribute food** on an individual level and how is that connected to policy actions and governance, taking both public and private sector into account?
5. How could we produce **food sustainably** in the future, taking the limitations of the physical environment (including water and salination) into account? How do we improve the efficient use of resources? Which land-use changes can we expect?
6. How should Bangladesh develop its food system in order to increase GDP while addressing **global standards/challenges**, involving both government and private sectors, and ensuring to reach every individual?

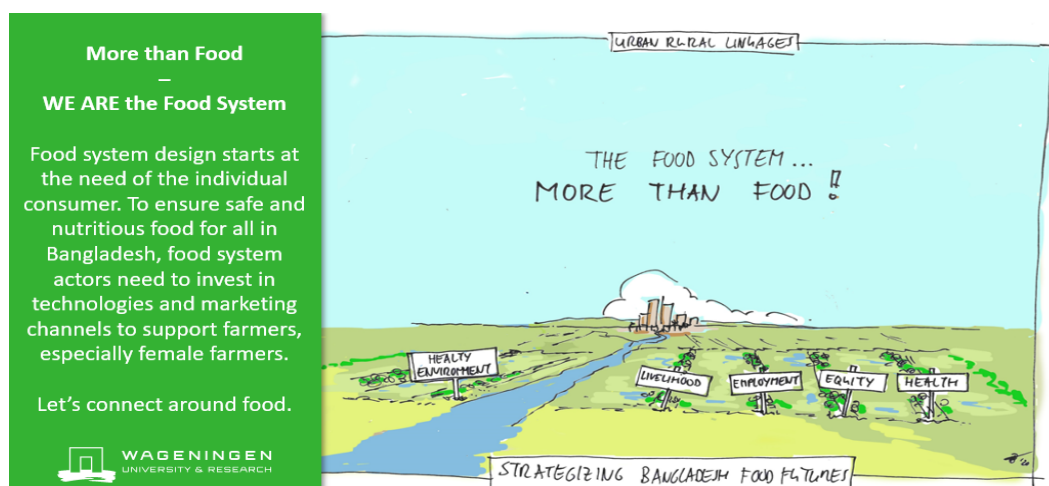
Next steps: Let's connect and work together!

Researchers and stakeholders need to invest in developing a common language. Although we are all working on different aspects, we have a lot in common. The food system approach supports us with a framework to identify where our work connects and helps us work towards the same outcomes.

- **Visualisation** of a food system ensures safe and nutritious food for all in Bangladesh followed up by **investments** in resilient technologies and marketing channels to support farmers, especially female farmers (short and long term)
- **Traceability**, at least at the union level, can help to trace the source contamination (short term)
- Postharvest microbial contamination can be minimised by ensuring the availability of **potable water** in the supply chain (mid and long term)
- Contamination of food can be prevented by giving **training and support to the wholesale markets** in urban and rural areas. Such **training** can include personal hygiene, packaging and handling of raw materials (mid and long term)
- **Clustering the industries** at the union level can help to prevent the entrance of industrial contaminants in agricultural products (long term)
- Transition is already happening by learning and making use of the transition and **mapping** stakeholders, existing initiatives, policies and governance practices (e.g. Mega Kitchen project in India)
- **Strengthening** the systems for **food safety**, such as waste management system, market monitoring, accredited laboratories (long term)
- **Sharing information** about prices, demand and supply (mid term)



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We like to extend a big 'Thank You' to all participants in the focus group discussions. Together we got new insights, and we hope that this will help all of us to work actively towards Zero Hunger.

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