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Operationalizing Food System Governance: The Case of Fort Portal Food Change Lab

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Abstract: Transforming the current food system into one which delivers healthy, sustainable diets will require some form of governance. Due to the complex nature of the food system, multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs), which bring together actors from multiple sectors into a shared space for joint decision making, have been proposed as one potential governance structure. Using the Food Change Lab, a multi-stakeholder platform led by a local civil society organization in Fort Portal, Uganda, as a case study, this paper uses an explicit conceptual framework for food system governance to understand how such an MSP can support improved food system outcomes. Local-level, civil-society-led MSPs have a limited ability to support a system-based problem framing, due to a tension between a holistic view of the system and identifying concrete entry points for action. They can support boundary spanning by creating horizontal linkages but are less effective in creating vertical linkages due to their locally embedded nature. Because such MSPs are not dependent on formal policy processes, they can be very adaptable and flexible in prioritizing issues and focus areas. The greatest influence of such MSPs in food governance is in supporting inclusiveness, especially of marginalized voices. While such MSPs are unlikely to be able to achieve food system transformation alone, they do play a key role in engaging with marginalized groups, supporting inclusion of local issues and promoting alternative food system visions.

Keywords: food system governance; multi-stakeholder platforms; civil society; Uganda; secondary cities

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1. Introduction

The need for food systems to be transformed is widely acknowledged [1]. The current food system is not delivering healthy and nutritious foods effectively. Close to a billion people are hungry, a number which has increased as a result of the COVID-19 crisis [2]. Stunting and wasting, markers of poor child nutrition, remain key concerns [3]. At the same time, levels of overnutrition and associated non-communicable diseases are increasing in many countries; currently, approximately 40% of adults and 20% of children are obese [4]. Food systems are also depleting natural resources, contributing to climate change and leading to reductions in biodiversity [5].

In order to transform food systems towards those which are better able to deliver healthy and sustainable diets, some form of food system governance structure is needed. We define healthy and sustainable diets as those which are "protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources" [5–8].

There is a growing literature exploring what factors are necessary to support food system governance. This paper will use the framework by Termeer et al. [7], which suggests five guiding principles for effective food system governance. These principles include using a system-based problem framing, creating boundary-spanning structures, adaptability to changing external circumstances, promoting inclusion, especially of marginalized voices,

and finally, if these factors are present, such a structure should support transitions to a fundamentally new food system [7].

1.1. Food System Governance in Growing Secondary Cities

1.1.1. The Importance of Secondary Cities

Small and medium cities, so-called secondary cities, are home to nearly 65 percent of Africa's urban inhabitants [9]. While there is increasing recognition of the importance of such cities, they tend to suffer from underdeveloped economies and a lack of resources for urban development, which are often prioritized for the capital city [9]. In Uganda, the government has identified ten key secondary cities, which will be prioritized for government funding, diverting resources away from the capital city, Kampala [10]. This is part of a concerted effort by the government to support the development of the country, with the idea that regional cities support regional growth of industries and services, providing opportunities to those migrating from rural areas and enabling the country's development trajectory [10].

The city of Fort Portal, Western Uganda, is one of these secondary cities. Fort Portal only received city status from the national government in 2020. The city has been growing rapidly, expanding from 41,000 in 2002 to 60,000 in 2020, with a projected growth to 500,000 by 2040 [11]. The Government of Uganda has developed "Vision 2040", outlining plans for the country to reach middle income status by 2040, with a specific focus on urbanization, and especially secondary cities, to increases productivity, livability, and sustainability of the country [11]. However, these "new" cities face a number of challenges, especially in terms of fiscal space to deliver services. While Fort Portal, along with nine other former municipalities, was granted city status in 2020, this was not accompanied by legal framework or budget [12]. While the city is expanding, there is no guiding policy document, making boundaries unclear, which increases challenges for revenue collection as jurisdiction for tax collection is unclear [12]. The lack of own revenue collection, and dependance on the central government for funding, creates challenges and limited fiscal space for cities to develop services for their growing populations [10].

1.1.2. Governing the Food Systems of Secondary Urban Cities

The government's focus on increasing the livability and sustainability of urban areas, as well at the recent UN food system summit dialogues, provides a key entry point to food system transformation discussions [13]. Urbanization is often mentioned as one of the key driving forces in the nutrition transition, a trend seen globally as people move away from traditional diets towards increasing consumption of processed foods [3,14]. Uganda is still at an early stage of its food system and thus dietary transitions, although, despite evidence of relatively low consumption of processed foods, obesity rates are increasing in secondary cities [15]. Opportunities to change the direction of food system transformation, combined with the new city status, provide opportunities for changing the direction of food system transitions in Fort Portal, as well as other secondary Ugandan cities.

Urban consumers are dependent on purchased foods, with 85 percent of residents in secondary Ugandan cities relying mainly on traditional markets to purchase their food and close to half relying on food given to them by relatives living in rural areas [16]. The urban food system is also much more vulnerable to disruption from various factors, including, but not limited to, environmental (drought, flood, and pest outbreak), political (protests), or measures to prevent disease spread (COVID-19 and Ebola) [17].

To be able to deliver sustainable healthy food to rapidly urbanizing areas, food systems need to be normatively steered [18]. In a few places, there are city-level efforts to steer the food system, for example, cities that are signatories of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, in which mayors commit to improving the food system in a way which delivers improved social, economic, and environmental benefits to society [19]. However, in much of the world, food system dynamics emerge from neo-liberal, market-based systems with a small number of corporations driving the agenda [20]. The food system is, of course, influenced by social

and environmental factors but is usually not driven by explicit goals agreed upon by a broad consensus from a wide group of societal actors [21]. New governance mechanisms are needed to steer future food systems in such a way that normative transformation is possible [6]. However, what form that governance mechanism should take, and who should be in the lead, remain unanswered questions.

Multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) have been increasingly promoted as a way to facilitate food system transformations. These platforms are generally understood as more or less formal engagements "bringing together a wide range of stakeholders around broad, general topics within a certain region or country, working across traditional sectors, scales and integrating cross-cutting themes" [22]. There is a high heterogeneity of forms, institutional arrangements, and goals within MSPs organized around food and nutrition issues. For example, MSPs differ in terms of aim (nutrition, agriculture production, and food safety), structure (loose, decentralized, open membership or closely governed, centralized, elective membership), urgency (resource dependency, crisis response, or societal development), or linkage (involving international, national, regional, or local levels) [23].

The potential of MSPs in agriculture research, innovation, food, and nutrition governance has been demonstrated, especially at the sub-national level. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) places multi-stakeholder platforms as central to developing new policies as part of the City-Region Food Systems approach, which aims to localize food systems [24]. The approach has been piloted in eleven cities globally, with several other cities planning to start working with the approach in the coming years.

However, the question of how MSPs promote food system transformation, and why some of them are more successful than others, must be better understood, especially as contextual variations will require local-level adaptation. Understanding factors that allow MSPs to be more effective, in what contexts, and for what types of issues, can support efforts to transform food systems to those which are better able to deliver healthy and sustainable diets.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper seeks to answer the question: what role can a civil-society-led MSP play in supporting food system transformations in a secondary Ugandan city? Sub-questions include: What actors and actor groups are included and excluded from such a platform? What types of issues, and at what levels, can such platforms work on, and around which issues do they find it challenging to engage? Based on this, what role might such platforms play in food system transformation?

Two conceptual frameworks were used to guide data analysis. The first aims to describe the MSP in terms of its aims, composition, urgency, structure, and function [23]. The second conceptual framework explores what factors are necessary for food system governance. These principles include a system-based problem framing, boundary-spanning structures, adaptability, inclusiveness, and transformative capacity [7]. The value of combining these frameworks is that it improves understanding of this specific MSP, who is involved, and the types of issues they focus on. The second framework allows for a deeper dive into the type of issue, and at what levels the MSP can engage, and what this might mean for the MSP's ability to support (elements of) food system transformation. The term lab is used in this paper to describe a living lab, a type of MSP which experiments with social innovations [25].

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: First, the case study is introduced, followed by a description of data collection and analysis. The results are presented following the proposed conceptual frameworks. A discussion section reflects on the findings, and the final section concludes and suggests potential future research directions.

2.1. Study Location

Case Study Project Description

The Sustainable Diets for All program (SD4All) was led by HIVOS, a Dutch development organization, and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), an organization supporting achievement of the sustainable development goals [26]. The Food Change Lab was set up in 2015 and is still active. In Uganda, the program was implemented by four partners: the Food Rights Alliance, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), Slow Food Uganda, and Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns, with KRC taking the leading position among them. The program supported, among other activities, the creation of the Food Change Lab, a living Food Change Lab which brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a joint understanding of the inherent tensions between producing healthy and sustainable diets for a growing population, while also considering environmental and economic outcomes of the food system [27]. The program sought to support citizen agency, which they define as "the individual and collective capacity that people have to be agents of their lives and development" [28]. Thematically, the food system is the central focus and program support focused on building the capacity of civil society to effectively advocate for food system transformations.

The Food Change Lab worked with stakeholders at multiple levels: at the individual level, collecting data about consumption patterns of the community using food diaries; at the community level, mobilizing informal food vendors and creating a team of nutrition champions; and at the national level, engaging in advocacy efforts to integrate nutrition into the third agricultural development plan of Uganda. The project also set up the Coalition of the Willing, a member of the Food Change Lab made up of alliances of key stakeholder groups who met regularly to debate and prioritize food system issues. While the program supported a larger number of activities, this paper will focus specifically on the activities of the Food Change Lab.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

Data collection began with a review of secondary data about the program. Initially, documents written for the purposes of sharing and communicating findings were reviewed [27,28]. This was complemented by the external end-term evaluation of the program, which was led by I&S Consulting [29]. All documents were downloaded from the program website between November and December 2021.

To answer additional questions raised by the document review and collect additional data and perspectives, interviews were carried out with individuals involved in the Food Change Lab. Interviewees were identified by the project manager of the SD4All project, who is employed by the Kabarole Research Resource Centre [30]. The project manager provided a list of 17 key stakeholders from the main actor groups participating in the program, including farmers, food vendors, chefs, artists, opinion leaders, and government nutrition experts. Semi-structured interviews guided by the Termeer et al [7]. conceptual framework, translated into interview questions, were conducted with five individuals by telephone in December 2021. Interviews were recorded, and transcripts of the calls were automatically generated. Data were validated by one member of the writing team during a three-day visit to the program in August of 2022. This visit included discussions with 10 members of the Coalition of the Willing, three farmers, two businesses, as well as the local nutrition governance structure, the district nutrition committee.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using thematic mapping, guided by the explicit conceptual framework of Termeer et al., which identifies five necessary principles for effective food system governance [7]. This mapping was carried out by the two researchers independently, and findings were discussed and reviewed together.

The principles guiding the mapping are as follows:

1: **System-based problem framing** avoids reducing the complex dynamics of food systems to a single problem and recognizes the involvement of many interacting subsystems.

2: **Boundary-spanning structures** address the challenge of bridging different subsystems and related fragmented siloed organizational structures.

3: **Adaptability** addresses the challenge of uncertainties and volatility of food systems as complex socio-ecological systems. Enhanced flexibility, reflexive learning (by doing), and relational learning by sharing information across scales and communities are instrumental in adaptive food system governance.

4: **Inclusiveness** underlines the political character of food system governance by addressing the question of whom to include and whom to exclude. Avoiding the often-identified problem of limited citizen involvement is important to ensure the legitimacy, accountability, justice, fairness, and equity necessary for sustainable development.

5: **Transformative capacity** addresses the need to overcome inherent resistance within present food system governance and to support transitions to fundamentally different food systems.

Adapted from Termeer et al. 2018 [7].

3. Results

The description of the multi-stakeholder platform is first presented according to the framework developed by Herens et al. [23] in order to better understand the structure and form of the platform itself, including the aim and dominant narrative, key stakeholders involved, urgency of the issue or what motivated individuals to become involved in the platform, functionality or what the platforms seeks to do, and linkages to other platforms and initiative [23]. This framework is used to allow the reader a better understanding of the form this specific MSP takes. This is followed by a presentation of the findings according to the five principles framework by Termeer et al [7].

3.1. Description of the MSP

The Food Change Lab represents an example of a civil-society-organized multi-stakeholder platform which operates mainly at the municipal level.

Aims and dominant narrative: The initial aim of the Food Change Lab was to address the large amount of food and natural resources exported from the region, which seemed counterintuitive to many in the community, given persistent high levels of food insecurity and stunting among children locally [31]. The Food Change Lab was concerned about the consumption of a monotonous diet that is high in starch and low in proteins and micronutrients, as well as the declining production of traditional crops despite their high nutritional value.

Composition: The Food Change Lab was established in the Fort Portal Municipality in 2015 by KRC and other non-governmental actors, initially as part of a donor-funded project. To support the involvement of a broad group of stakeholders, the Coalition of the Willing (CoW), a self-organized, multi-stakeholder platform, was formed. Membership includes associations of farmers, artists, food processors, food vendors, chefs, nutritionists, and local and opinion leaders. The lab was also active with local government, including nutrition governance structures, and was able to engage elected officials at the national level around certain key issues. While the organizers sought to ensure participation from all key stakeholder groups, in practice, certain groups, such as traders, who did not see the value in participating, tended to self-exclude.

Urgency: The key issues which the Food Change Lab focuses on were defined by the group annually, often with inputs from action research carried out by KRC. An example of an issue the Food Change Lab worked on is food safety, specifically the safety of food sold by informal vendors. Activities included stakeholder mobilization, with the establishment of the Fort Portal Street Food Vendors Association, with a membership of around three-quarters of all street food vendors, as well as with policy dialogues with local government officials. The Food Change Lab worked on changing the food production

ordinance amendment, which made it challenging for food vendors to operate legally, due to food safety requirements linked to access to clean water, which drove vendors to work in unsanitary conditions to prevent detection by the authorities.

Structure: The Food Change Lab members meet three times a year: once at the start of the year to define an action plan and discuss how to raise funds for the chosen issue(s), and then twice more to exchange on progress made over the course of the year. These yearly action plans guide the key priorities for the coming year. Membership is made up of associations, rather than individuals, to ensure continuity of engagement.

Functionality: The Food Change Lab uses participatory action research to identify key issues, which were then shared with the community for discussion and prioritization. MSP members also contributed to formal policy processes, including contribution to the 2020–2025 District and Sub County Nutrition Action Plans.

3.2. Reflection on the Food Change Lab's Support of Food System Governance Issues

3.2.1. System-Based Problem Framing

The Fort Portal Food Change Lab was framed as a food system project from the beginning [29]. As mentioned, the core issue that triggered the establishment of the Food Change Lab was the high rates of malnutrition and low levels of dietary diversity in an area exporting food to other regions in the country and internationally. Citizens were also concerned about changing dietary patterns, with people abandoning nutritious traditional crops. This dynamic can partially explain the Food Change Lab's success, as solutions were found among a wide spectrum of actors sharing a common goal.

The project used participatory problem identification to uncover critical challenges and develop solutions [32]. Key solutions included stimulating local food production by working with farmers and food retailers, supporting street vendors to improve food safety, and stimulating the consumption of more traditional crops. While food trade and export were initially identified as a key issue, they have been given less emphasis, and there is no clear involvement of the MSP with issues related to aggregation, distribution, and trade.

Consumption, and associated impacts of inadequate consumption, including malnutrition, is the main food system outcome which led to the establishment of the MSP. Because of the strong interest in consumption, the Fort Portal MSP focused its work on formal nutrition coordination structures and policy processes, including the 2020–2025 District and Sub County Nutrition Action Plans and yearly action plan definition. The problem framing tends to focus on nutrition and consumption, with less emphasis on environmental and economic outcomes, although other food system outcomes were considered: promotion of indigenous foods was made on both nutritional value as well as reduced environmental impacts. Economic outcomes of the food system were less of a priority for the MSP.

3.2.2. Boundary-Spanning Structures across Both Level and Sectors

In order for a food system governance structure to be able to operate effectively, it must be able to bridge siloed organizational structures, both in terms of working across sectors and also working with multiple levels of governance, from municipal to regional to national level or even supra-national levels.

The Food Change Lab has been able to successfully integrate a wide array of stakeholders and sectors around its food system agenda within the city. The Food Change Lab was able to create a number of structures, including the Coalition of the Willing and the street vendor association, to support horizontal linkages across sectors. The Food Change Lab also created space and voice for traditional groups including the Orugali group, made up of female farmers and chefs who were dedicated to supporting increased production and consumption of traditional foods [33].

While there was a strong focus on horizontal integration and working with actors across sectors, there was much less focus on vertical integration. This meant that some issues, for example, changes to national-level policies and laws around street vending, were left in an ambiguous space [29]. At the local level there was broad agreement to no

longer enforce such laws, but at the same time, these laws and policies remain officially in the books.

3.2.3. Adaptability and Monitoring Allowing for Flexibility and Learning

The Food Change Lab collected evidence using various participatory methodologies, working with a range of approaches that engaged citizens to become more aware of their food system, for example, using "food diaries" to collect data on rural and urban diets. These data were used to assess the nutritional value of diets consumed by those with a low income and engage participants in a dialogue about their food consumption practices [33]. "Lorry counting" in a local trading hub was carried out to ascertain the amount of food leaving the region. This knowledge was shared at public events, for example, during the 2016 Peoples' Summit on Food, in order to generate buy-in and momentum from stakeholders.

The agenda for the Food Change Lab and its partners is set annually, ensuring flexibility and adaptability to the evolution of the food system. The Food Change Lab meets three times a year: once to set the annual agenda and two subsequent meetings to share progress. The Food Change Lab has no set budget, in order to prevent dependency on specific projects, and thus must also identify fundraising strategies for the prioritized issues.

3.2.4. Inclusiveness Especially of Marginalized Voices

The Food Change Lab is led by a locally embedded civil society organization with a strong track record in advocacy. Using their convening power, KRC was able to bring together government representatives from Fort Portal municipality and district, farmers, (informal) food vendors, and local civil society to map out the core issues in the local formal and informal food system. The food system problem framing allowed for broad participation and was successful in bringing together stakeholders representing a number of food system activities, including consumers as well as more unusual groups such as visual and performance artists who are interested in improving the food system. Differences in terms of engagement by age were mentioned, with youth more willing to adopt new ideas but often having less power to do so. Older people, who are often in positions to influence behaviors, may be less willing to adopt new ideas.

One major achievement of the Food Change Lab was the amendment of 2006 Kabarole food and production ordinance. The law had been passed but was not implemented. Through intense participatory advocacy, the Food Change Lab was able to propose amendments and, even without formal ratification of the amendment, induced a change in attitudes towards street food vendors. Their status was recognized, dialogue between vendors and law enforcement bodies and policymakers was encouraged, and as a result, perception of the informal sector improved. With improved perception came improvement in infrastructure, including street lights, designated areas for vending, access to water, and application of hygienic standards. The Food Change Lab was also able to support the vendors to start offering more healthy food choices.

"You will see a lot of improvements of the menus on the street and in terms of hygiene. Their position in the street, they have access to areas of vending, which was signed directly with the City Council to ensure that we have water on the road that they can be used for sanitation and hygiene."—Key informant interview.

While the Food Change Lab was able to successfully include some private sector actors, particularly street food vendors and hotel chefs, it had less success with engaging other private sector actors including larger food traders and distributors. Interviewees highlighted that private sector actors were mainly motivated by profit, and benefits to participate in an MSP were not clear to them.

3.2.5. Transformative Capacity to Overcome Path Dependency and Increase the System's Sustainability

Transformative capacity is inherently the hardest issue to define, and overcoming resistance within the food system will require engagement of actors at various levels. In Uganda, the country is focusing on commercialization, with twelve priority crops (bananas, beans, maize, rice, casava, Irish potato, tea, coffee, fruits and vegetables, dairy, fish, livestock, cocoa, cotton, oil seeds, and oil palm) identified due to their potential to further develop the export market [34]. There is a perception that farmers are abandoning traditional crops and focusing on export markets because it is profitable. Traders and food distributors have no incentive to transform the food system toward locally produced traditional foods, especially if there is limited local demand for these crops.

Ensuring access to adequate human and financial resources is a challenge, especially in the long run, for civil-society-led MSPs, which are not embedded in formal governance structures. After the closure of the initial project that set up the Food Change Lab, the main organizational structures that were set up continued to function. Their roles in coordinating the development of a yearly action plan remain. Implementation of the plan is carried out by individual actors based on individual or joint fundraising. The Food Change Lab is able to fulfill its primary function of convening actors to discuss critical food system challenges; nevertheless, there is a sense that resources are lacking to really implement food system transformation.

"After the end of SD4All, [if] there been other projects with resource attached that have been channeled through the Food Change Lab, otherwise the sustainability of the action is only through volunteerism and continuing the good dynamic and the good knowledge sharing that was started with SD4all."—Interview respondent.

4. Discussion

4.1. System-Based Problem Framing

While there is wide recognition that food system transformations will only be possible by working with a system-based framing [21,35–37], how such system-level thinking can be applied in real-world settings remains an unanswered question. "Food systems include activities and processes related to all aspects of food production, processing, distribution, preparation, consumption and disposal, including market and institutional networks for their governance . . . [as well as] outcomes of these. . . . [on] health, livelihoods and the environment" [6]. When working with this definition in practice, the boundaries quickly expand, making it challenging to develop implementable solutions. In the Food Change Lab, this complexity was tackled by choosing two elements of the food system to focus on, production and consumption. This decision is a combination of finding a realistic entry point and developing a pragmatic solution, engaging actors with whom the project had convening power, farmers, and consumers rather than private sector actors, especially distributers and retailers, with whom the project had less power and control. This narrowing down of focus to an element of the system is also employed by others seeking to make food systems practical [22]. However, this could also be a critical oversight, as evidence from both high- and low-income contexts illustrates the power of the retailers and traders is much greater than the consumer, raising questions of how far a food system can transform without working with these actors [35]. This solution, promoting local production and consumption of traditional foods, is also in competition with the cash crop export model supported by the Government of Uganda. This represents a classic example of a policy lock-in and raises questions of whether small-scale, local-level actions are able to provide a meaningful alternative model [1].

If MSPs organized by civil society are unable to engage all actors, with which actors can they most meaningfully engage, and what implications does this have for the types of issues they can most meaningfully address?

4.2. Boundary-Spanning Structures across Both Level and Sectors

An effective food system governance structure must be able to bring together many actors, including from government, private sector, research, and civil society. The extent to which these actors are able to exert agency and influence to govern food systems differs in distinct cultural and political contexts [35]. This makes it challenging to suggest what an ideal structure could be, as this will vary significantly depending on the context. Formal governance structures and policy-making processes, in their current form, are less effective at spanning boundaries as they exist to tackle specific issues rather than interconnected issues [35]. For example, in most countries, including Uganda, there is a ministry of agriculture and a separate ministry of health but not a ministry of food. Because the food system is so large, many government ministries are involved, but food is not the sole remit of any specific one, which means that, while elements of the food system are part of a ministry's wider mandate, they are not its priority.

This challenge of integrating sectors was previously seen in the creation of multi-sectoral nutrition governance structures. Nutrition has been described as "everyone's problem but no one's responsibility". Over the past decade, multi-stakeholder nutrition governance became more widely accepted with the establishment of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement (2010). SUN is a global movement of governments, United Nation (UN) organizations, private sector, and civil society, who are working collectively to increase the visibility of nutrition on the global agenda and increase political will to ending malnutrition. This increased attention to multi-sectoral nutrition governance has also led to increased attention to track country efforts to improve nutrition governance, including the implementation of multi-sectoral governance structures [38,39]. Nevertheless, implementing such multi-stakeholder policies remains challenging, especially when it comes to issues of budget prioritization [40]. Food system governance represents an even greater challenge. In contrast to nutrition, for which there is a reasonable level of agreement around potential solutions, and some progress has been made in setting up governance structures, for food systems, there is some agreement around outcomes, meeting human dietary needs without exceeding the plant's carrying capacity, but not how those outcomes will be achieved [1,41,42]. MSPs working on food system issues, especially those which focus on nutrition outcomes, must work within the existing (multi-sector) nutrition governance space. In that sense, as long as governments function along sectoral lines, food system MSPs may also end up needing to work with existing structures and systems, which may lead to a gradual loosening of the multi-sector perspective.

As food system thinking becomes more embedded, nutrition outcomes are increasingly seen as one of the many outcomes of the food system, along with environmental and social outcomes. This may lead to even greater challenges, as an even broader group of stakeholders, with competing values and priorities, will need to come together. In the food system, what is good for one actor may not be for another. For example, while farmers may benefit from high food prices, low-income consumers will not [8]. The Food Change Lab was able to support actors to come together around issues for which there was broad consensus; however, it was less well placed to deal with more challenging or controversial issues. Finding a governance structure which has both the mandate and the authority to convene actors and come to a shared vison remains a critical challenge for food system governance, and one which a civil-society-led MSP may be less able to fulfill.

While the Food Change Lab focused on working at the municipal level, it also recognized that many issues, such as climate change, require national engagement. Vertical integration presents a key challenge for an MSP convened by such a locally embedded organization. One way that the Food Change Lab sought to engage in national level discussion was by working with Members of Parliament (MPs) who represent the local region. Because KRC, the hosting organization, has cultivated strong connections with local MPs, they are able to bring local issues into national discussions through these representatives. However, the members of the Food Change Lab mentioned that, while they were unable to have the national-level policy banning street food vending formally changed, they were able

to limit its enforcement at the local level, illustrating again a pragmatic approach to food system change. This challenge of actual policy change is supported by others who have found that the idea of "information is power," alone is not always successful in bringing about desired change [43]. Research into citizen agency has found that providing citizens with information, without also supporting the state's ability to respond, may have limited longer-term impact to bring about lasting change, suggesting a two-pronged approach in which citizens and state institutions are capacitated may be necessary [43].

4.3. Adaptability and Monitoring Allowing for Flexibility and Learning

In order to be able to effectively steer a food system, a governance structure needs to have adequate capacities. One tool which has been developed is the five capacities (5Cs) framework, which can support multi-stakeholder processes to plan, monitor, and evaluate the capacity and results of their work [44]. The 5Cs framework specifies five capabilities which are necessary for an organization to have societal impact: the capacity to act and commit, the capacity to deliver on new development objectives, the capacity to adapt and self-renew, the capacity to relate to external stakeholders, and the capacity to achieve coherence [44].

Table 1 includes the five capabilities, a reflection on how the Food Change Lab demonstrates these capabilities and where there may be room for improvement. Some of the choices of the Food Change Lab, for example, ensuring that it is not project based and will continue beyond a specific project or program, are pragmatic, reflecting the inherent limitations of a platform led by a civil society organization. Civil-society-led platforms, while lacking a formal budget that might be available for government projects or programs, are also less dependent on political or election cycles for continued funding.

Table 1. Capacity of the Food Lab according to the Five Capacities Framework.

	How This Food Lab Demonstrates This Capability	**Challenges Faced by the Food Lab**
Capacity to act and commit	Able to move from a broad analysis of food system issues visible to tangible solutions.	Longer term capacity to commit and act may be limited by the lack of longer-term funding.
Capacity to deliver on new development objectives	Able to choose specific issues, such as sanitation in food vending and achieve tangible changes.	Formal policy change has not yet been achieved.
Capacity to adapt and self-renew	Lab is made up of alliances not individuals; annually develop a new agenda.	Must fundraise annually. No set-budget and reliance on voluntary contributions of time and resources from members may threaten sustainability.
Capacity to relate to external stakeholders	Ability to bring in a range of often-marginalized groups such as informal vendors.	Less able to bring together private sector actors. This limits the types of issues the lab can work on.
Capacity to achieve coherence	Able to bring together a wide variety of stakeholder ranging from informal vendors to policy makers around the issue of informal food vending.	Working on issues around which there is a lack of consensus remains a challenge.

Civil-society-led MSPs can be highly adaptable and flexible, redefining their objectives based on evolving reality. However, they also run the risk of their agenda being taken over by particular agencies' priorities. This tension between flexibility and vision may be hard to reconcile, and a specific MSP must make the decision for itself on how to best work with these tensions.

4.4. Inclusiveness Especially of Marginalized Voices

A recent review seeking to advance the research agenda on food system transformation highlighted the need for a better understanding of how food system actors are able to organize and exercise their agency outside of formal (state) governance structures [45]. An

analysis of MSPs working in the food and agriculture space found that "several categories of actors (are) routinely missing in MSPs including consumers or community voices, and the private sector" [23]. Although MSPs are keen to claim legitimacy based on the participation of "all categories of stakeholders", it is generally a pioneering group, often made up of civil society, local government, and academia, which negotiates the terms of engagement and the conditions that determine further MSP membership [23].

The Food Change Lab was able to engage marginalized voices effectively from the start. It used citizen science to collect data on rural and urban diets and shared these findings at the 2016 Peoples' Summit on Food to generate buy-in and momentum from stakeholders. Critical issues, including supporting improved access to and promoting consumption of indigenous foods were selected by the community based on these data.

When it comes to inclusion, it is also interesting to note the relative absence of conflict in the Food Change Lab, as confirmed by all key informants. The main reason given for this absence of tension is that the Food Change Lab, as an innovation and knowledge platform, promotes topics and opportunities but does not directly handle activities and resources. While it is important to foster a positive atmosphere, some issues in food system transformation will require tradeoffs. It is possible that only stakeholders sharing a common goal and vision invest in the MSP, while conflicting opinions or interests are marginalized or self-excluded. The set-up and mandate of the Food Change Lab can also limit the level of inclusion, as some actors self-exclude from the platform or have no interest in joining. This may also limit the level of impact, as only consensual action can be promoted.

The issue of power among stakeholders should also be considered, especially in bringing in the voices of marginalized groups [46]. However, considering the multi-dimensional nature of power, civil-society-led MSPs may be able to demonstrate certain types of power, such as "power with" or the ability for groups to act collectively [46]. A synthesis of power in MSP processes reflected on the different types of power held by marginalized groups and found that they may have significant networks and connections, which can serve as an asset to becoming a more strategic (powerful) partner [47]. In the Food Change Lab, giving a voice to marginalized groups was a key focus, working with groups who are traditionally left out, including informal vendors and those living on lower incomes. These groups, especially informal vendors, may have self-excluded from formal governance structure, suggesting a specific added value of a civil-society-led MSP for bringing in marginalized voices.

4.5. Transformative Capacity to Overcome Path Dependency

What does transformative capacity look like? Bene (2022) argues that transformative capacity is a "deliberate, purposeful process aimed at improving the system and its outcomes," and argues that there are four key forces that lead to the current unsustainable trajectory [1].

Two of these forces relate to the current profit-driven nature of the food system. Technological innovation is driven by profits, transnational corporations, and their stakeholders, who benefit from the current system and are resistant to change [1]. The production paradigm, which has dominated food system discussions since World War II, and which was reinforced by the global food crisis in 2008, has hindered development of a coherent policy framework which will support the development of a sustainable food system (19).

The other two forces relate to the challenge of creating alignment between the various interests and values of other actors. These include government, consumers, and farmers, as well as the role of science and evidence shaping future food systems [1]. There is a growing literature looking at the potential role of civil society and social movements to support new food governance structures, especially in high-income countries [48]. In other contexts, collective action had been shown to be an effective approach to increase food system sustainability, for example, the role of La Via Campesina, food sovereignty, and local food movements [35].

However, this type of outsider activism which has been seen in other contexts, with civil society pushing for an alternative food system and actively pushing against the status quo, was not seen in this case. While this could be a potential role of civil-society-led MSPs in transforming the food system, the current power structures and roles of various actors in Fort Portal would suggest that civil society does not have this space or power. The transformative power of the MSPs explored here suggests a role in providing tangible solutions to practical food system challenges (informal food vending) or a renewed focus on potentially neglected issues (indigenous foods) but working within the existing structures.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, what value can a civil-society-led MSP working at the local level add to food system governance in the Ugandan context?

Such an MSP can support a system-based framing but to a limited degree. There is a tension between having a holistic view of the food system and being able to take concrete steps and actions, which often requires narrowing one's focus. Additionally, the lack of convening power of such an MSP means that they will likely struggle to engage with key constituencies, especially larger private companies, that need to be included when looking at the entire food system. However, they are well placed to come up with pragmatic solutions to food system issues and are well placed to support citizens and consumer groups to engage with the food system.

Local-level MSPs can be especially strong at spanning boundaries and creating horizontal linkages, especially around specific issues. In the case explored here, improving food safety for informal actors, bringing together informal vendors, market authorities, the press, and concerned citizen groups to create change. They can also provide a space for ongoing dialogue between members and identifying priority issues. However, vertical integration is a challenge for such MSPs, which may limit the types of issues that they can be effectively engaged with.

Because civil-society-led MSPs are not dependent on formal policy processes, they can be very adaptable and flexible in prioritizing issues and focus areas. However, a more informal MSP without a longer-term funding structure is limited in terms of the types of formal monitoring and learning structures which can be developed.

Where local-level MSPs led by non-state actors are likely to have the greatest influence is by supporting inclusiveness, especially of marginal voices, including the youth, female farmers, and informal actors at the city or regional level. They are likely to have more legitimacy with these groups and stronger networks. These networks may allow them to claim greater legitimacy when participating in formal governance structures. Creating a formal structure for often-marginalized groups to come together, such MSPs may also provide a channel for greater inclusion in formal governance discussions.

Given transformative capacities will require convening diverse actors and developing consensus around challenging issues, civil-society-led groups may not be the best-placed actors to negotiate these tensions as they do not have the mandate or authority. However, in other contexts, such groups have been able to gather widespread support for alternative food system visions and promote these visions in the context of framing the directions of the future food system.

While civil-society-led MSPs supporting food system governance at the local level is unlikely to achieve food system transformation alone, they do play a key role in engaging with marginalized groups, including informality, supporting dialogue which engages consumers, and developing solutions around less controversial issues of the local food system. In the future, it is possible they may also play a broader role in promoting alternative food system visions.

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