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From Ministries of Food to National Food System Committees: A Global Mapping and Typology of Multisectoral Food System Governance Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Transforming the ways food systems are governed is key to achieving better social, environmental, and economic outcomes, all crucial to sustainable development. Strong multisectoral governance is critical to achieving this, but there is little evidence on the structure and function of governance mechanisms in this context. We undertook a policy review of 197 countries globally to map existing multisectoral food system governance institutions, develop a typology based on their characteristics, and identify their building blocks. We identified 34 countries with a relevant institution: four established a ministry (or unit), and 30 had a formal structure for coordination ('governance mechanism') in place. Ten such mechanisms only included government agencies, while 20 had a participatory approach and included non-state actors. We identified nine building blocks that define the functions that the institutions are designed to fulfil, from tasks across agenda setting, policy making, decision making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The diverse institutions uncovered indicate that there is no single 'one-size-fits-all' solution.

1 | Introduction

Achieving sustainable development requires that food systems provide healthy food for all people through equitable, resilient, and environmentally friendly methods of production, distribution, and commercialisation (Caron et al. 2018). Food systems also need to provide sustainable livelihoods for those employed across the supply chain while being inclusive and resilient to climate change, conflict, and other disruptions (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO 2025). However, current food systems fail to deliver these social, environmental, and economic outcomes (Fanzo et al. 2022). Food insecurity and malnutrition continue to pose a major threat to billions of people worldwide (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO 2023); small-scale farmers remain in poverty, and the labour of women, children, older people, and people with disabilities remains unseen (Oxfam 2018). At the same time, food systems are among the largest contributors to climate change (IPCC 2023).

An essential contributor to improving food systems outcomes across social, environmental, and economic dimensions is greater coherence and coordination between the different actors and policy sectors that play a role in the food system, from food production, processing, distribution, and trade to

consumption (UN 2021b). Policy incoherence, when the objectives and activities of the different actors and policy sectors are not aligned, often results in unintended negative consequences because of wasted resources and duplication of effort, and trade-offs that are not desirable (Bojic et al. 2022; UN 2021b). For example, agricultural policies that encourage unsustainable intensification of crop cultivation might result in deforestation and loss of biodiversity, and thus, contribute to long-term food insecurity (D Patay and Gonzalez 2023). However, when policies are aligned and several sectoral ministries work in a coordinated manner, it can generate efficiency with regard to implementation and can reinforce shared aims and all-of-government goals (Schneider et al. 2025). For example, measures that discourage the consumption of ultra-processed foods and encourage healthier options may increase demand for fruits and vegetables and thus, may contribute to greater producer profits as well as environmental benefits (Gautam et al. 2022).

Transforming the ways in which food systems are governed is key to achieving better social, environmental, and economic outcomes, and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (Farmery et al. 2025; Leeuwis et al. 2021; UN 2021a). Siloed food system governance is a critical contributor to policy incoherence and current food system failures (Bojic et al. 2022; UN 2022). Traditional (public) policy sectors relevant to food systems include agriculture (with livestock), fisheries, forestry, environment, trade, industry, finance, infrastructure, health, education, gender, Indigenous affairs and others. However, this siloing makes it difficult for governance to account for the interdependent nature of food system components fully (Hammelman et al. 2020).

Effective food system governance is key to strengthening policy coherence, as it defines how food system sectors and actors (from ministries to non-state stakeholders) engage with each other and consolidate conflicting interests, mandates, and ideas, and the ways power asymmetries are addressed (D Patay et al. 2025). Governance refers to 'how societies are steered and how power and resources are distributed' (Kickbusch and Gleicher 2013). It influences societal values and norms and determines who holds the power to define priorities, frame problems, propose solutions, and implement them (Kickbusch and Gleicher 2013). This perspective highlights the role of state and non-state actors, including commercial and market actors, civil society, and international organisations, such as UN agencies, in shaping governance (Ayres and Braithwaite 1991). In this study, food system governance is defined as the 'tailored process by which societies negotiate, implement, and evaluate collective priorities of food systems transformation while building shared understanding of synergies and trade-offs among diverse sectors, scales, and stakeholders' (UNFSS 2021). Inadequate food system governance structures may exacerbate and institutionalise existing power asymmetries between stakeholders, which can render prioritisation of health, social, or environmental interests difficult and, thus, undermine efforts to deliver equitable food system outcomes (Béné 2022; Fanzo et al. 2021).

Understanding the prevalent paradigms about who should govern and how is critical for any efforts to strengthen food systems (Leeuwis et al. 2021). Since the 1990s, the dominance of neoliberal ideologies related to the power of free markets has been growing, leading to the increasing role of market and commercial actors in governing societies (Navarro 2007; Zerbe 2019). This is well observable today in the ways that large multinational agri-business and food manufacturer corporations shape global food systems (J. Clapp 2023; Howard et al. 2021; Severova et al. 2011) and how voluntary approaches to regulation are widely accepted (Ralston 2021). The strong presence of multinational commercial and market actors at the UNFSS has also raised concerns about the extent and ways in which commercial and market actors should be involved in food system governance (Canfield et al. 2021; J. Clapp et al. 2021; Montenegro de Wit et al. 2021). Although the concept of good governance suggests that a range of stakeholders needs to be involved in governance (Grindle 2017), food system governance by the public sector must consider the need to manage potential conflicts between commercial, private, and public interests or the implications for equity (Patay and Gonzalez 2023; Patay, Ralston, et al. 2023; Patay, Schram, and Friel 2023).

Following the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), governments around the world have developed their strategic plans for food system transformation (the National Food System Transformation Pathways), many of which include commitments to new country-level food system governance arrangements and to embrace whole-of-food system approaches (Farmery et al. 2025; D Patay et al. 2025; UNFS Coordination Hub 2025b). However, it has become clear that strengthening multisectoral food system governance—the ways different government ministries and agencies work together on food system issues—is a difficult endeavour; thus, a focus on governance was central to the UNFSS+4 Stocktake event in 2025 (UNFS Coordination Hub 2025c).

However, there has been little systematic analysis of the governance institutions that countries establish to facilitate coherence in food system policies. This study aims to fill this gap by undertaking a country-level policy review of multisectoral food system governance institutions worldwide.

We drew on governance theories, such as the administrative process theory (Croley 2008) and the theory of institutional collective action (Feiock 2013), which offer valuable perspectives for addressing two key questions that underpin debates on food system governance: which actors should be involved, and how can they be brought together for meaningful action (D Patay et al. 2025). While a range of non-state actors participate in national-level food system governance, from commercial and market actors to communities, international grassroots organisations, and civil society, governments maintain a central role: they have the legitimacy to create rules and uphold the rule of law as institutions elected by the public as part of the social contract (at least in democratic societies) (Seabright et al. 2021). Thus, seeing the government as the foundational agent for food system governance, this study focused on state-led, national-level governance institutions. While evaluating the effectiveness of the identified institutions exceeds the scope of this study, this practical overview will provide a useful guide for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders in their efforts to strengthen national-level food system governance.

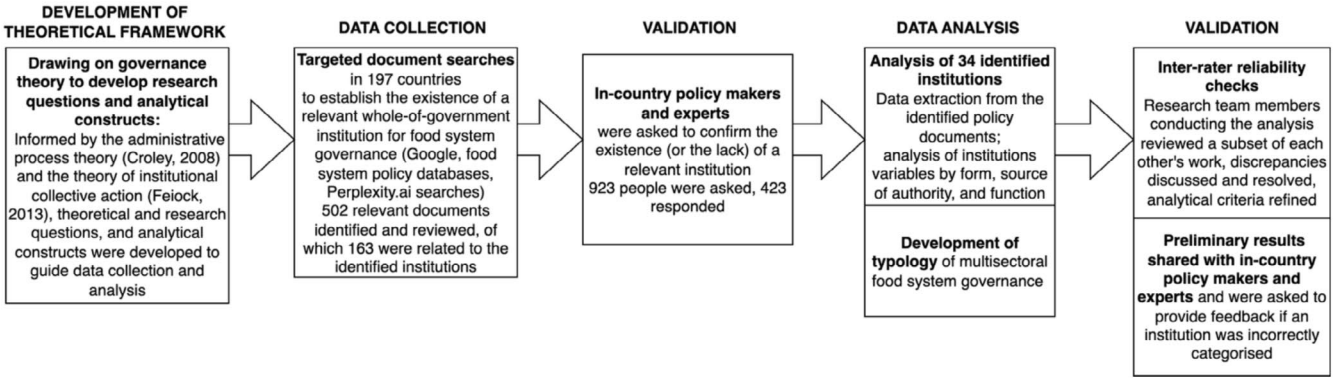

FIGURE 1 | The methodological process.

2 | Methods

This study followed a qualitative design and adopted a policy analysis (Bromell 2024) of country-level food system governance institutions, informed by governance theories (Croley 2008; Feiock 2013). Our methodological process is summarised in Figure 1. The term 'governance institutions' addresses both (a) *ministries*, that is, stand-alone organisational units of governance (which in some countries, like Australia, are called Departments rather than Ministries), and (b) the institutional *mechanisms* that provide formalised interaction between these agencies, such as committees, councils, or forums. We had three objectives: (i) to map existing national-level multisectoral food system governance institutions globally, (ii) to develop a typology of multisectoral food system governance institutions, and (iii) to identify institutional 'building blocks' related to institutional arrangements and non-state actor engagement.

2.1 | Theoretical Framework

Governance theory offers a lens for thinking about food system governance that considers conflicting interests and power asymmetries between different actors. The administrative process theory suggests that governments should create governance mechanisms that are able to ensure equitable access to all relevant stakeholders to shape how societies are steered (Croley 2008). When examining food system governance and the role of state actors, it is essential to appreciate that ministries across policy sectors have different mandates and priorities (also shaped by influences from various non-state actors), which tend to contribute to policy incoherence across food system policies (Bojic et al. 2022; D Patay et al. 2025). Hence, the cornerstone of any multisectoral food system governance approach is to increase alignment between government ministries (Bojic et al. 2022; D Patay et al. 2025). Furthermore, as the calls for more equitable and transparent food system governance grow louder (Canfield et al. 2021; J. Clapp et al. 2021), governments are under pressure to make sure that stakeholders other than the powerful agribusiness and food industry actors, such as communities, grass-root organisations, and civil society, are also heard. Therefore, understanding the type of actors involved in the identified governance institutions and the extent of their engagement will be useful to show the current state of play in terms of who governs food systems at national levels (Table 1)—at least through formal mechanisms, as this study does not capture the influence of non-state actors through informal channels. The administrative process theory was also used to explore the role of collaborative and participatory institutions in food system governance (Table 1).

Governance theory also helped us understand how countries worldwide approach institutional collective action in food system governance. The theory of institutional collective action explains that the risk of collaboration between government agencies breaking down is high when the involved actors' decisions and actions might negatively impact the others' efforts, or when these actors are driven by widely different ideas, for example, about how food systems should work or what they need to deliver (Feiock 2013). This theory also suggests that the more actors involved and the more complex issues need to be resolved, the higher authority needs to be delegated to the multisectoral institution to be able to steer the interaction between the parties successfully (Feiock 2013; Kim et al. 2020). This theory explains why so often multisectoral noncommunicable disease committees led by health ministries struggle to generate meaningful engagement with ministries of trade, economy, or agriculture: health sector agencies often lack the authority needed to bring these usually powerful actors to the table (Patay, Schram, and Friel 2023), and sectoral ministries cannot govern or coordinate other ministries unless specifically designated by the President or Prime Minister. Finally, this theory also explains that it is vital for the parties involved to perceive the potential benefits arising from the collaboration to be higher than its estimated costs (Feiock 2013). Multisectoral collaboration often requires that financial resources, which otherwise would be channelled through one ministry only, are shared among several ministries, which may encounter resistance from the ministry that is losing funds. Additionally, collaborative structures may incur high administrative costs, from financial to human resource burdens, which might deter state and non-state actors from participating in a collaborative initiative. In summary, the theory of institutional collective action can be useful to analyse how multisectoral food system governance institutions are constructed and how these structures may address collaboration risks (Table 1).

2.2 | Data Collection

Between January and May 2025, we searched for policy documents, reports, and other relevant grey literature from national, regional, or international/global agencies that provide

TABLE 1 | The theoretical framework.

Theory	Topic	Theoretical questions	Research questions	Analytical constructs
Administrative process theory (Croley 2008)	Considerations of regulatory (corporate) capture and governance for broad public interests	Who should govern (food systems)?	Who (what type of actors) are involved in the identified multisectoral food system governance approach?	Involved state actors; types of involved non-state actors
			How and in what (policy) functions are these actors involved?	Actor involvement in policy cycle functions (agenda setting, policy formulation and decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
		What is the role of collaborative and participatory governance mechanisms in governance for the public interest?	What is the purpose of the identified multisectoral food system governance approach?	Mandates, purpose and functions of the identified institutions across policy cycle functions
				Exclusivity of mandate
			What (policy) functions does the identified multisectoral food system governance approach fulfil?	Functions of the identified institutions across policy cycle functions (agenda setting, policy formulation and decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation)
Theory of institutional collective action (Feiock 2013)	The conditions that need to be in place for meaningful, effective collective (multisectoral) collaboration or engagement	Is there enough convening authority behind the approach to meaningfully bring all necessary actors together?	Who/what agency leads the approach? Does the lead (agency) sit at sectoral or suprasectoral level?	Location of convening authority: sectoral (ministerial) or suprasectoral (supraministerial)
		Are the governance structures set up appropriately to achieve the stated purpose?	How is the identified governance approach structured?	Governance structures
		Do the perceived benefits exceed the estimated cost of collaboration?	Does the identified multisectoral food system governance approach build on existing structures or it was created as a new (additional) structure?	Building on existing structures/ new ones created

information on national level whole-of-government institutions to foster policy coherence among food system sectors and actors in 197 countries. The searches were undertaken in Google, using search terms such as 'multisectoral food system governance', 'ministry of food', 'food system committee', 'food system council', 'whole-of-government food system' in combination with country names. We reviewed the first 100 search results for each country, as this threshold typically captures the most relevant and accessible documents while maintaining feasibility across 197 countries. In addition, we conducted targeted searches in food system policy databases, such as FAOLEX (FAO 2025a), the UN Food System Coordination Hub database (UNFS Coordination Hub 2025a), and the One Planet Network's Sustainable Food System Programme database (One Planet Network 2025). We also searched government websites, focusing on ministries of agriculture, health, environment, and others that seemed relevant in the given country context. Finally, to locate any further documents or websites that might have been missed, we used Perplexity.ai—an AI-powered search and information synthesis tool that aggregates and summarises information from multiple online sources (Perplexity AI 2025). Once a relevant institution was identified, we conducted additional Google and Perplexity.ai searches with the institution and country name. We entered the following prompts: 'Does X country have a multisectoral food system governance approach in place?' and 'What do you know about X mechanism/institution in Y country?' Then, the references provided by Perplexity.ai were examined and collected if they provided information about a potentially relevant institution. Thus, we used this AI tool only to locate additional data sources; we have not applied it for data analysis (Fabiano et al. 2024). We identified and reviewed 502 documents, of which 163 were directly relevant for the whole-of-government institutions for food system governance.

The relevant documents were screened to identify any references to multisectoral food system governance institutions (Objective 1), according to the criteria presented in Table 2. When necessary, Google Translate was used for translation. To increase the validity of screening (Patton 1999), three researchers discussed the relevance of the identified institutions as required. We also collected information about country income levels (World Bank 2025), types of government (CIA 2025), and types of food system (Marshall et al. 2021).

The screening was validated by in-country policymakers and experts (Patton 1999). Altogether, 968 representatives of country governments, development partners (i.e., UN agencies, the World Bank, international or local non-governmental organisations), and academics were contacted by email and asked to confirm the relevant institutions found or lack thereof in their country. Representatives of government agencies and development partners were identified through online searches and snowball sampling from previously identified in-country contacts. Academics and other experts were identified by searching Google Scholar for relevant publications in that country. During validation, in-country contacts were asked to provide references to the relevant multisectoral food system governance institutions, including policy and legal documents, reports, government websites and other official documents. In addition, a results brief was shared with all in-country contacts, requesting that they flag any potentially relevant institutions that may have been missed. However, no data was collected directly from the country contacts. The purpose of their involvement was to ensure that we had not missed any relevant institutions during our policy analysis informed by documentary data. As this validation process involved only verification of publicly available institutional information and no collection of data from participants, human research ethics approval was not required.

2.3 | Data Analysis

We undertook a content analysis of the documents that met the inclusion criteria (Kleinheksel et al. 2020). A customised screening and data extraction spreadsheet was created to extract and compare relevant variables across the identified food system governance mechanisms. The main themes and variables were informed by the theoretical framework (Table 1), but additional variables were added inductively. The themes included *form* (with the variables 'structure' and 'origin') (i.e., whether it was built on existing mechanisms or established new); *source of authority* (with the variables 'mandates', 'sectoral or suprasectoral', 'lead agency', and 'establishing authority'), *function* (with the variables 'members', 'participants' seniority level', 'type of non-state actors involved' 'operating mechanisms', and 'accountability structures').

After data extraction was completed, a descriptive analysis was conducted to consolidate characteristics against each country approach, grouping into a classification system (Bradshaw et al. 2017). The countries were also analysed by income level (World Bank 2025), type of government (CIA 2025), and type of food system (Marshall et al. 2021) to help reveal any potential relationship between these factors and the type of institution chosen. To understand whether the UNFSS might have influenced countries' decisions to adopt the identified institutions, their date of establishment relative to the UNFSS was assessed. Moreover, where available, the National Food System Transformation Pathways (UNFS Coordination Hub 2025b) were reviewed to identify which countries already had a multisectoral food system governance approach in place or had made commitments to establish new institutions.

A typology of multisectoral food system governance institutions (Objective 2) was developed based on the identified institutions. Informed by the theoretical framework (Table 1), the institutions were first classified based on their form: ministries or mechanisms. *Ministries* were assessed by their exclusivity of mandate: the extent to which the ministry (or other distinct government unit) is mandated to focus only on food system governance or if it is tasked to undertake other roles (Figure 2). They were also categorised by multisectoral convening authority: the extent to which the ministry has the authority to bring all relevant policy sectors together (Figure 2).

Mechanisms were classified based on the type of actors involved, the ways they were engaged (approaches to multisectoral and participatory engagement), and their structures. To reflect on who is involved in food system governance, the identified mechanisms were organised across the continuums of multisectoral and participatory governance (Figure 3). The continuum of multisectoral governance illustrates the range of state actors

TABLE 2 | Inclusion and exclusion criteria for multisectoral food system governance institutions.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1. It has a permanent structure to facilitate alignment across government agencies/sectors in food system governance, and steer or monitor how food system priorities or policies are defined, and/or implemented.	1. It is an informal, ad hoc or non-permanent structure.
2. The stated objectives focus on multiple, broad whole-of-food system outcomes across social (including health), environmental, AND economic dimensions. (If broad terms, such as food security, are used throughout the description of mandates/objectives, then policies, meeting reports or other documentation of the operations of the governance mechanism/agency were screened to understand how the stated objectives translate into whole-of-food system outcomes.)	2. It only focuses on one major food system component or outcome (e.g., food waste, product reformulation). Or the objectives across all three dimensions (environmental, social, and economic) are not explicitly stated.
3. It operates at the national level.	3. It operates at sub-national, regional, or local levels.
4. Applies a whole-of-government approach: it includes/engages government agencies/policies that govern environmental, social, health, trade, industry, economy/fiscal or similar sectors (i.e., not just selected sectors).	4. It excludes government agencies with primary mandates around food production, environment, or health.
5. Government-led.	5. It is led by non-state actors, such as UN agencies, civil society actors, or commercial or market actors.
6. It has already been operationalized and is currently in operation.	6. It is currently in planning or preparation phase, and yet to be operationalised, or it us currently not in operation.

involved; the continuum of participatory governance indicates the number (and type of) non-state actors that are involved in the mechanism. Whole-of-government mechanisms fall into the lower right quadrant: they primarily involve government agencies. Whole-of-food system mechanisms (D Patay et al. 2025), which aim to align state and non-state actors' priorities and actions on food systems and thus used mixed multisectoral and participatory approaches, fall into the right upper quadrant. Those mechanisms that sit in the left upper and lower quadrants are led by non-state actors and focused on engaging a variety of stakeholders or are led by state actors and focused on engaging selected government agencies. Since this study aimed to solely identify government-led institutions, only the mechanisms in the right lower and upper quadrants were examined.

The institutions were then analysed based on their *functions* across the policy cycle, from agenda setting, policy formulation and decision making, to implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Objective 3). These policy cycle functions were broken down into building blocks based on the mandates and functions identified across the relevant institutions.

To further strengthen the analysis, the research team members conducting the extraction and analysis performed inter-rater

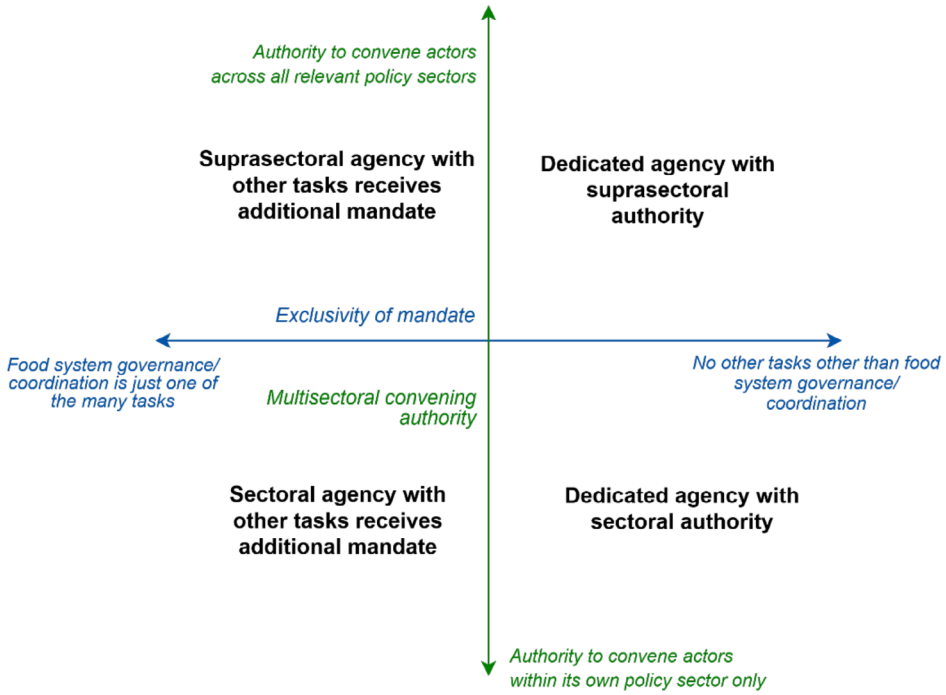

FIGURE 2 | Agencies by exclusivity of mandate and multisectoral convening authority.

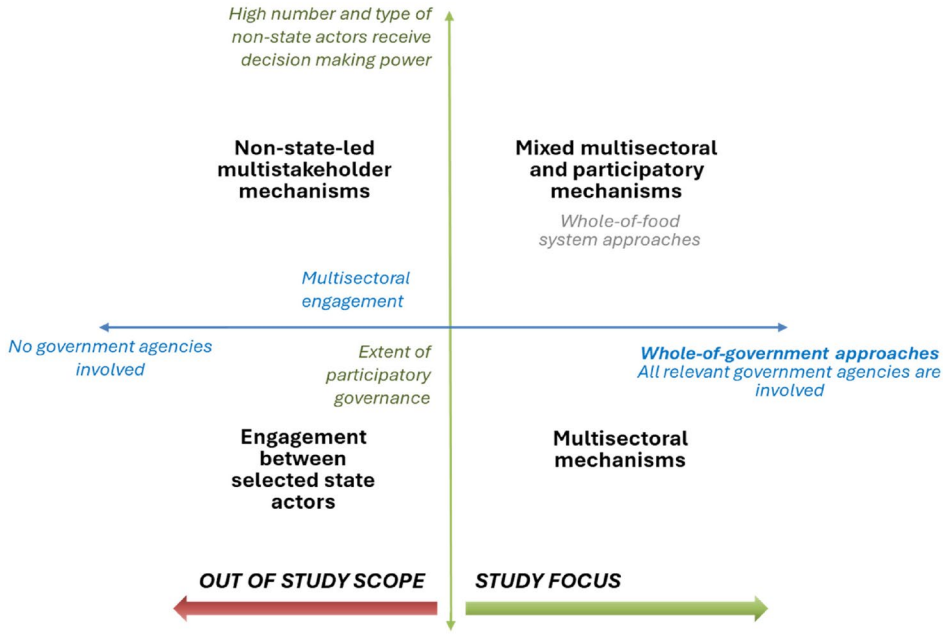

FIGURE 3 | Food system governance mechanisms by multisectoral and participatory governance.

reliability checks by reviewing a sample of each other's analysis (subset of 30%–50% of the identified institutions) to assess consistency in data extraction and classification. Discrepancies were identified and discussed until consensus was reached, and the extraction criteria were refined as needed to improve the reliability of the analysis (Patton 1999). Additionally, brainstorming discussions were held among the authors about the themes and structure of the typology. Furthermore, the draft typology was presented and discussed with 14 experts, including representatives from Australian state governments, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. The feedback focused on clarifications of the applied criteria, the terminology used, and visualisation.

3 | Results

3.1 | Multisectoral Food System Governance Institutions Worldwide

Of the 197 countries surveyed, we identified 34 (17%) with a national level multisectoral food system governance institution (Table 3). These countries are highlighted in Figure 4. It is important to note that, among countries that did not meet our inclusion criteria, (i) several in-country contacts indicated during validation that their government is in the process of establishing a multisectoral food system governance approach, or that (ii) there was a multisectoral food system governance mechanism but it did not include certain government sectors, such as health or environment, and thus failed to meet the inclusion criterion of having a whole-of-government approach for this study.

Multisectoral food system governance institutions were more frequently found in countries with lower income levels. Of the 31 low-income countries globally, 10 (32%) had established such institutions, compared with 7 of 54 lower middle-income countries (13%), 11 of 56 upper middle-income countries (19%), and 6 of 75 high-income countries (8%). The data did not suggest any relevant association between the type of government and the chosen multisectoral approach. According to food system types, 12 institutions were found in countries with predominantly 'rural and traditional' food systems, 3 in 'informal and expanding' food systems, 10 in countries with 'emerging and diversifying' food systems, 3 in 'modernising and formalising' food systems, and 6 in countries with 'industrialised and consolidated' food systems. We could detect no relevant pattern associated with food system types.

Apart from in Bangladesh, where there was a long-standing ministry for food governance (the Ministry of Food, established in 1971), the formation of multisectoral food system governance institutions appeared to be a more recent initiative, with an increasing number of institutions put in place in the past 10 years globally. Approximately half of the identified institutions ($n = 17$) date from before 2021—the year of the first UNFSS—nine of which were established in the 5 years prior to 2021. The other half ($n = 16$) were adopted in the last 4–5 years.

We compared the commitments in national pathways for food systems with those countries that have already established an approach. Around half of the countries ($n = 61$) that have a publicly available Food System Transformation Pathway (published around UNFSS 2021) refer to strengthening current multisectoral food system governance institutions or establishing new ones. Ten of the 61 countries already had a multisectoral food system governance institution. To date, another 11 countries have followed through with their commitment, raising the number of countries with realised efforts to 21. We also identified several countries that were in the process of establishing new food system governance institutions (i.e., Cameroon or Malta) or had an approach that only partially met our inclusion criteria but reflected on UNFSS. Moreover, 13 of the 16 countries established a new institution despite not making such commitments in their National Pathway (or did not have a pathway published or participate in the UNFSS events).

Several of the identified institutions were adopted as multisectoral food security and nutrition initiatives. In some cases, the name of the institution was changed to reflect a shift to the 'food systems' lens, such as in Sierra Leone, where the Scaling Up Nutrition Unit was renamed to Scaling Up Nutrition & Food Systems Coordination Unit in 2024. While repurposing existing governance structures might incur fewer costs than creating new ones, establishing new structures has been the preferred option in at least 11 countries since the UNFSS 2021. In most of these countries, a suprasectoral mechanism or agency was created; the policy documents in many of these countries confirm that a suprasectoral authority was preferred to a sectoral authority with an expanded mandate.

3.2 | A Typology of Multisectoral Food System Governance Institutions

Out of the 34 national-level multisectoral food system governance institutions identified, 30 are formal mechanisms, including multisectoral food system committees, councils, or working groups; and 4 are ministries or dedicated food systems coordination units. As mechanisms are more common, we started the typology with this approach, followed by agencies.

3.2.1 | Mechanisms

Ten countries have mechanisms that primarily involve government agencies, while 20 countries established mechanisms that use mixed multisectoral and participatory governance approaches (including non-state actors). While all mechanisms investigated involved a wide range of government agencies working across food system-relevant policy areas, there are different structures in place for coordinating and connecting these government agencies (Figure 5). Furthermore, there is great variation in the type of non-state actors involved, the extent of their involvement, and the decision-making power granted (Figure 5). The establishment of a *supporting unit*, such as a secretariat, to assist with day-to-day coordination and administrative tasks, was common. In some cases, such as in the Dominican Republic, these are also tasked with providing technical advice.

3.2.1.1 | Multisectoral Mechanisms Without or With Limited Non-State Actor Engagement. Certain mechanisms appeared to mainly focus on creating alignment between government agencies. Among *single-level multisectoral*

TABLE 3 | The global overview of multisectoral food system governance institutions.

Country	Income level (World Bank 2025)	Type of government (CIA 2025)	Predominant type of food system (Marshall et al. 2021)	Name of multisectoral food system governance institution	Year institution was established	Type of multisectoral food system governance institution
Austria	High-income	Federal Republic (Parliamentary Democracy)	Industrialized & consolidated	Coordination Center for Sustainable Food Systems	2022	Dedicated unit
Bangladesh	Lower middle-income	Parliamentary Democracy	Rural & traditional	Ministry of Food	1971	Dedicated agency
Brazil	Upper middle-income	Federal Presidential Constitutional Republic	Emerging & diversifying	National Food and Nutrition Security System: National Council for Food and Nutrition Security; National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security; Interministerial Chamber on Food and Nutrition Security	2006	Tri-modal mechanism (part of a multi-level governance structure)
Cambodia	Lower middle-income	Multiparty Democracy under a Constitutional Monarchy	Rural & traditional	Council for Agriculture and Rural Development	1994	Single-level multisectoral mechanism with supporting unit
Cape Verde	Lower middle-income	Republic (Semi-presidential system)	Emerging & diversifying	Interministerial Council for the Sustainable Food System	2024	Single-level multisectoral mechanism with supporting unit
Chad	Low-income	Republic (currently under Transitional Military Government)	Rural & traditional	Technical Committee for National Coordination for the preparations for the UNFSS (continues to operate)	2021	Single-level multisectoral mechanism with in-built mechanisms for non-state actor involvement
Colombia	Upper middle-income	Presidential Republic	Emerging & diversifying	Intersectoral Commission on Food and Nutrition Security within the National System for the Progressive Guarantee of the Right to Food	2008	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
Dominican Republic	Lower middle-income	Presidential Republic	Emerging & diversifying	National Council for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security; Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty; National Network for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security	2016	Dual state-centric mechanism with supporting unit (part of a multi-level governance structure)
Ecuador	Upper middle-income	Presidential Republic	Emerging & diversifying	Food and Nutritional Sovereignty System; Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Food Sovereignty	2009	Dual stakeholder-centric mechanism

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Country	Income level (World Bank 2025)	Type of government (CIA 2025)	Predominant type of food system (Marshall et al. 2021)	Name of multisectoral food system governance institution	Year institution was established	Type of multisectoral food system governance institution
Ethiopia	Low-income	Federal Parliamentary Republic	Rural & traditional	1. Food System Multisectoral Technical Core Team 2. Food Systems Secretariat	2023	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism with supporting unit
Gabon	Upper middle-income	Republic (Presidential, currently under transitional military government as of 2023)	Emerging & diversifying	1. National multisectoral committee for food and nutritional security; 2. Multisectoral and multistakeholder platform for food and nutrition security	2017	Dual participatory mechanism
Ghana	Lower middle-income	Presidential Republic	Informal & expanding	Cross-Sectoral Planning Group on Food Systems and Nutrition	2025	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
Indonesia	Upper middle-income	Presidential Republic	Emerging & diversifying	Coordinating Ministry for Food Affairs	2025	Dedicated agency
Iraq	Upper middle-income	Federal Parliamentary Republic	Informal & expanding	National Food Security Committee; Food Systems Coordination Unit	2017	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism with supporting unit (part of a multi-level governance structure)
Israel	High-income	Parliamentary Democracy	Industrialized & consolidated	Food Security Administration (within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security)	2024	Dedicated unit (within dedicated agency)
Japan	High-income	Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy	Industrialized & consolidated	Headquarters for Strengthening the Foundations of Stable Food Supply and the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Industry	2015	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Jordan	Lower middle-income	Constitutional Monarchy	Emerging & diversifying	Higher Council for Food Security; National Food Security Committee	2023	Dual, delineated mechanism
Malaysia	Upper middle-income	Federal Constitutional Monarchy	Modernising & formalising	Cabinet Committee of National Food Security Policy	2020	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Mexico	Upper middle-income	Federal Presidential Republic	Modernising & formalising	National Intersectoral Council within National Intersectoral System of Health, Food, Environment and Competitiveness (SINSAMAC)	2024	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism (part of a multi-level governance structure)

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Country	Income level (World Bank 2025)	Type of government (CIA 2025)	Predominant type of food system (Marshall et al. 2021)	Name of multisectoral food system governance institution	Year institution was established	Type of multisectoral food system governance institution
Morocco	Upper middle-income	Constitutional Monarchy	Emerging & diversifying	National Steering Committee for Food Systems Transformation	2024	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Nepal	Low-income	Federal Democratic Republic	Rural & traditional	Food System Steering Committee	2021	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
Palestine	Lower middle-income	Semi-presidential Republic	Informal & expanding	Food and Nutrition Security Council; SDG2 Working Group	2021	Dual state-centric mechanism
Peru	Upper middle-income	Presidential Republic	Emerging & diversifying	Multisectoral Commission on Food Security and Nutrition	2002	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
Qatar	HIC	Absolute Monarchy	Industrialized & consolidated	Food Security Committee	2017	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Sierra Leone	Low-income	Presidential Republic	Rural & traditional	Scaling Up Nutrition & Food Systems Coordination Unit; Ministerial Steering Committee; Multistakeholder platform	2017/2024	Dual stakeholder-centric mechanism with supporting unit (part of a multi-level governance structure)
Somalia	Low-income	Federal Parliamentary Republic	Rural & traditional	Council for Food Systems, Nutrition, and Climate Change; Food Security and Climate Change Unit; Multistakeholder platform	2023	Dual state-centric mechanism
Sudan	Low-income	Provisional Government	Rural & traditional	Higher Council for Food Security and Nutrition (2015); Technical Secretariat for Food Security (2009)	2009/2015	Dual multisectoral mechanism
Sweden	High-income	Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy	Industrialized & consolidated	Coordination Committee for the effective implementation of the food strategy	2024	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
Thailand	Upper MIC	Constitutional Monarchy	Modernising & formalising	National Food Committee	2008	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Timor-Leste	Low-income	Semi-presidential Republic	Rural & traditional	National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition in Timor-Lest; Permanent Technical Secretariat; Inter-Ministerial Food and Nutrition Security Working Group with support unit	2010	Tri-modal mechanism (part of a multi-level governance structure)

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Country	Income level (World Bank 2025)	Type of government (CIA 2025)	Predominant type of food system (Marshall et al. 2021)	Name of multisectoral food system governance institution	Year institution was established	Type of multisectoral food system governance institution
Uganda	Low-income	Presidential Republic	Rural & traditional	National Food Systems Coordination Committee	2022	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism
United Arab Emirates	High-income	Federation of Absolute Monarchies	Industrialized & consolidated	Emirates Council for Food Security	2019	Single-level multisectoral mechanism
Yemen	Low-income	Provisional Government	Rural & traditional	National Food Security Committee/Food Security Steering Committee; Supreme Council for Food Security and Nutrition; Food Security Technical Secretariat	2019	Dual, state-centric mechanism with supporting unit
Zambia	Low-income	Presidential Republic	Rural & traditional	Food Systems Transformation Technical Working Group	2021	Integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism

mechanisms, there is a sole institution dedicated either to political or technical coordination. For example, in Cape Verde, the Interministerial Council for Sustainable Food Systems brings together state agencies to create alignment among executive-level government officials, such as ministers, on high-level policy directions. In Thailand, the National Food Committee focuses on technical coordination between the relevant government actors, where the details of policies and programs are discussed in the presence of mid-level bureaucrats. In Sudan, however, both are in place, creating a *dual multisectoral mechanism*, where separate high-level, strategic (political) and technical mechanisms are structured to operate together: the Higher Council for Food Security and Nutrition and the Technical Secretariat for Food Security.

As part of these multisectoral mechanisms, *non-state actors* might be engaged for consultation or technical advice, but these actors are carefully selected and do not take part in decision-making or constitute regular members. For example, in Chad, the Technical Committee for National Coordination for the preparations for the UNFSS (which continued to operate post the first UNFSS in 2021) engages selected NGOs in an advisory role.

3.2.1.2 | Multisectoral Mechanisms With Participatory Approaches. In 20 of the multisectoral food system governance mechanisms, non-state actors are involved in setting strategic or policy priorities, designing and/or implementing policies or programs, or delivering services, as part of a whole-of-food system approach. However, the type of non-state actors engaged varies greatly and may or may not follow principles around conflicts of interest or consider power asymmetries. In some countries, like Ecuador, only small and medium-sized enterprises operating across the food supply chain are invited to participate. In Ethiopia, several farmers' associations are included. Large food industry actors are excluded in some countries, like Mexico. The involvement of development partners, such as UN agencies and development agencies of foreign governments, for example, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) or the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), seems to be particularly common in low and middle-income countries that often rely on technical assistance. File S1 presents the type of non-state actors engaged by each mechanism.

In terms of structure, we differentiated one single-level, four dual, and two tri-modal mechanisms that have a mixed multisectoral and participatory approach (Figure 5). The single-level, *integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism* encompasses both state and non-state actors within one structure, as seen in the case of the Food System Steering Committee in Nepal. The simple *dual participatory mechanism* features a separate political and technical mechanism structured to operate together, both involving state and non-state actors. For example, in Gabon, the National Multisectoral Committee for Food and Nutritional Security provides a platform for political decision-making, and the Multisectoral and multistakeholder platform for Food and Nutrition Security plays a role in technical coordination. In contrast, the *dual delineated mechanism* separates state and non-state actors but is structured so that they operate alongside. Jordan adopted this approach with

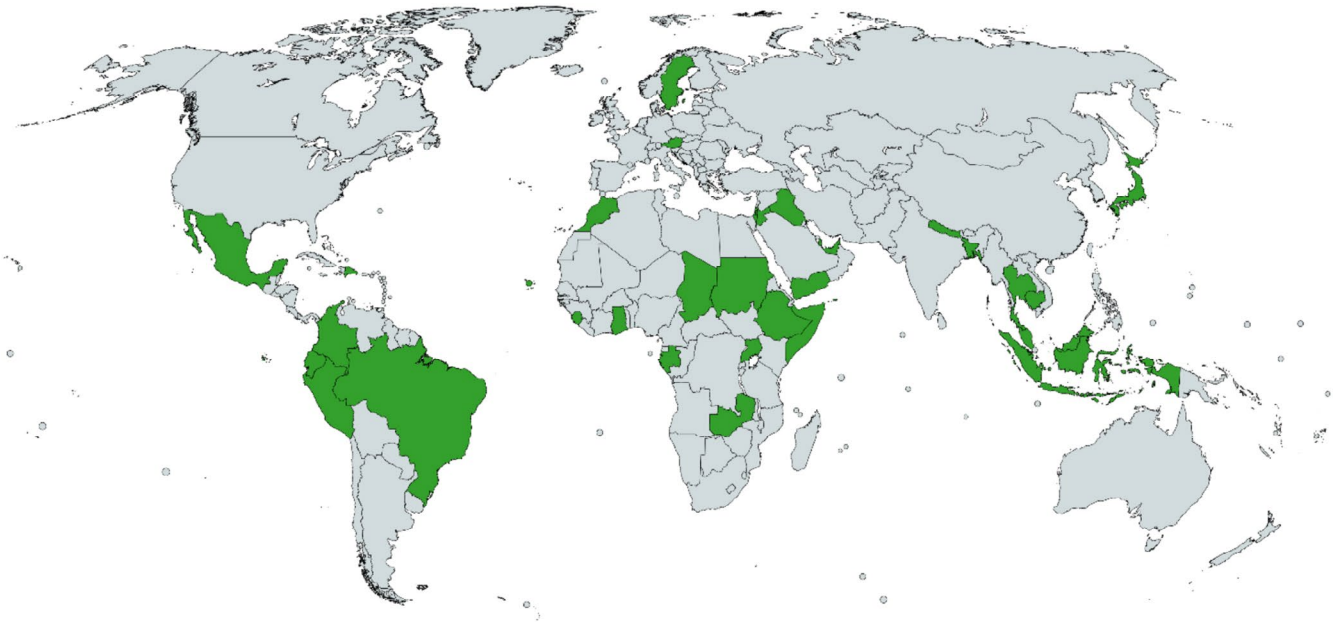

FIGURE 4 | Countries with a multisectoral food system governance institution (Map created with Mapchart.net).

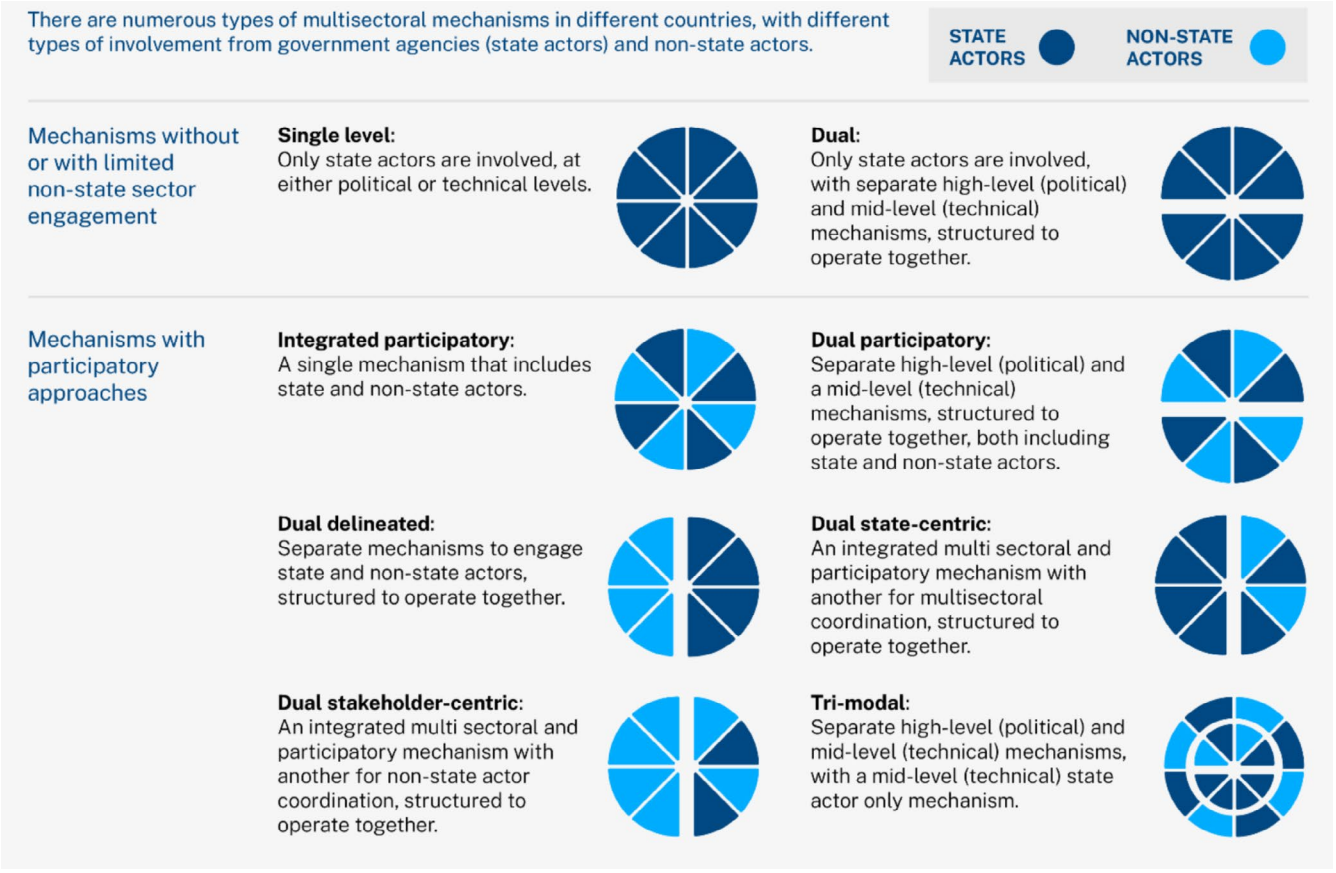

FIGURE 5 | Multisectoral food system governance mechanisms by multisectoral and participatory engagement.

a Higher Council for Food Security for high-level, strategic decision-making and a National Food Security Committee for technical coordination. The *dual state-centric mechanism* features an integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism, as well as a mechanism for multisectoral coordination that excludes non-state actors. For example, Somalia operates a Council for Food Systems, Nutrition, and Climate Change that comprises only government agencies, and a Multistakeholder

platform for fostering dialogue between state and non-state actors. Similarly, the *dual stakeholder-centric mechanism* features an integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism, whereas the other mechanism is dedicated to non-state actor coordination and thus it does not involve state actors. Ecuador's food system governance mechanism follows this approach: the Food and Nutritional Sovereignty System brings together government agencies and civil society, while the Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Food Sovereignty serves as a platform dedicated to civil society.

The *tri-modal mechanism* has a high-level conference where state and non-state actors discuss and decide upon the strategic priorities, an integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism, and a government-only multisectoral mechanism. In Brazil, the National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security meets every 4 years to determine the country's strategic directions relevant to food systems. The National Council for Food and Nutrition Security serves as a forum to align priorities and policies across state and various non-state actors, while the government-only Interministerial Chamber on Food and Nutrition Security ensures coherent implementation.

3.2.2 | Ministries and Dedicated Units

Four countries established a new ministry or unit or expanded the mandates of an already existing ministry to cover coordination across food system matters. Figure 6 situates the identified multisectoral food system governance ministries (or units) across the continuum of exclusivity of mandate and multisectoral convening authority.

One institution was identified as a ministry with other tasks that received the additional mandate to coordinate food system policies (Figure 6, lower left quadrant). When an existing ministry is given the role of coordinating food system-relevant work being undertaken in other agencies, food system governance/coordination may be just one of the many tasks that the agency undertakes. In Israel, the Ministry of Agriculture was renamed the Ministry of Agriculture *and* Food Security in 2024, and it adopted new mandates aimed at strengthening environmental and social food system outcomes, in addition to economic objectives. To fulfil these mandates, a dedicated unit, the Food Security Administration, was established within the Ministry. It is important to note that several other countries were identified as having a Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security; however,

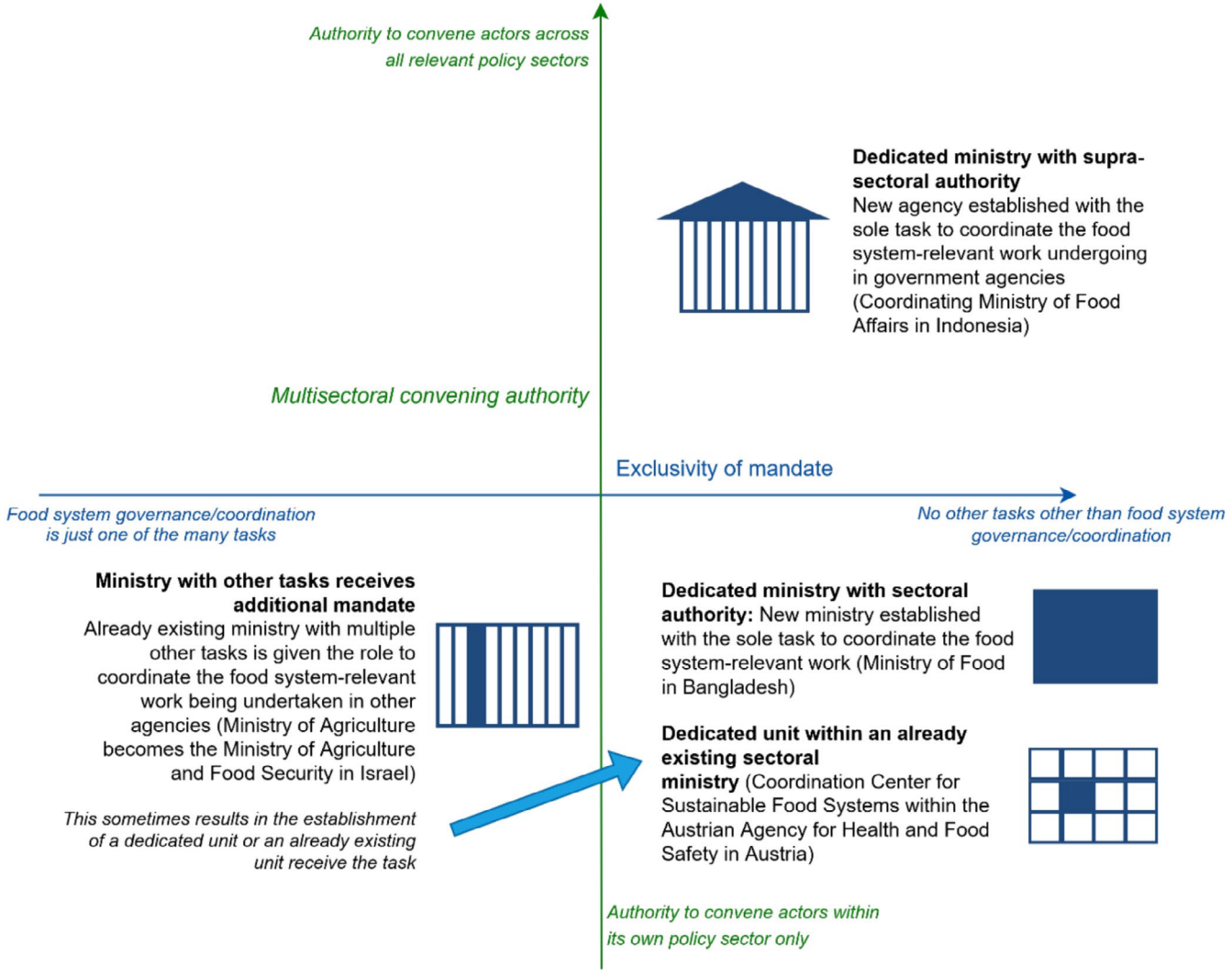

FIGURE 6 | Food system governance ministries by exclusivity of mandate and multisectoral convening authority.

these seemingly lacked institutionalised approaches to address policy matters outside of the agricultural and supply sectors, and hence were excluded.

Two institutions were identified as belonging in the lower right quadrant of Figure 6, having no other tasks than governing food systems, but not having a suprasectoral mandate over other government ministries. As mentioned above, Bangladesh has had a Ministry of Food since 1971; however, it has only recently begun to adopt new strategies that consider environmental sustainability and nutrition outcomes beyond the narrow interpretation of food security associated with ensuring the supply of staple foods. In Austria, a health sector agency accepted this responsibility. Within the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety, a dedicated unit was established: the National Coordination Centre for Sustainable Food Systems.

One ministry was identified to be in the upper right quadrant: in Indonesia, a new suprasectoral agency was established with the sole task of coordinating food system-relevant work across government agencies. Since 2024, the Coordinating Ministry of Food Affairs has been coordinating the food system-related activities of ministries responsible for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, environment, as well as the National Food Agency and National Nutrition Agency (Figure 6).

3.3 | The Building Blocks of Multisectoral Food System Governance Institutions

We identified nine building blocks that define the functions that the institutions described above are designed to fulfil, from tasks related to agenda setting, policy making, decision making over those policies, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (Figure 7). The 34 institutions contain a wide variety of combinations of these building blocks, possibly reflecting the specific local context, including already existing structures. None of the institutions identified contains all nine building blocks, and there was no indication in the data of whether a multisectoral food system governance institution is made better or worse by incorporating fewer or more of these blocks, or whether any specific building block/s improved the success or otherwise of a multisectoral food system governance institution.

The following presents the building blocks in the order of policy cycle functions, from agenda setting to monitoring and evaluation (Buse et al. 2012). Within the functions, the more frequently used building blocks are presented first. File S2 presents in detail what building blocks the identified institutions comprise.

3.3.1 | Agenda Setting

A main priority for some governments was to create a space for dialogue among a range of state and non-state actors to share information and discuss preferences. These governments established national multistakeholder platforms or networks, which could be set up to enable joint *decision-making on strategic priorities*, such as the National Conference on Food and Nutrition Security in Brazil. However, some governments wished to reserve this space for *advocacy, dialogue, and information sharing* rather than decision-making, like the National Network for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security in the Dominican Republic.

3.3.2 | Policy Formulation & Decision Making

The most common purpose of the multisectoral food system governance institutions is to *coordinate and align* existing and newly developed policies and programs relevant to food systems. When the goal is to align government agencies, the single-level and dual multisectoral mechanisms provide the necessary space. Then, depending on the extent of non-state actor engagement desired, in-built processes are adopted to involve selected stakeholders. However, when the purpose of the mechanism is to create coherence not just among state but also among non-state actors, participatory forums, committees, or working groups are established. These participatory approaches could serve as a stand-alone structure, such as an integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism (e.g., the National Food Security Committee in Iraq). Alternatively, they can be part of a dual set-up, either accompanied by a multisectoral structure (e.g., a dual state-centric mechanism, as in the Dominican Republic) or another participatory structure (e.g., a dual stakeholder mechanism, as in Ecuador). Participatory structures to coordinate policy and program development and planning across state and non-state actors are also part of the tri-modal mechanisms identified in Brazil and Timor-Leste.

A second purpose is to *develop policies* drawing on multidisciplinary and multisectoral knowledge and experience. To pool technical expertise for policy design, relevant actors are brought together in committees, councils and working groups. In some countries, these mechanisms are stand-alone, such as the Food

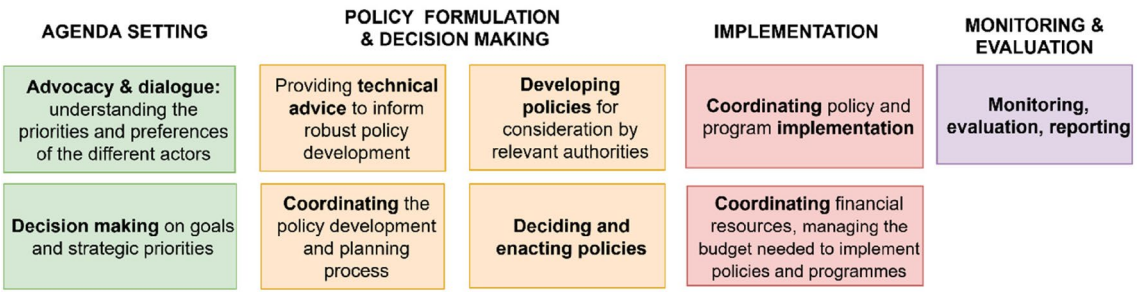

FIGURE 7 | The building blocks of multisectoral food system governance institutions.

System Steering Committee in Nepal. In others, such a mechanism is coupled with a high-level (political) body where decisions are made on which policy alternatives to adopt, as seen in Gabon, Sudan, Jordan, and Yemen. Again, in some countries, certain non-state actors, like United Nation agencies, are involved in the policy development process through participatory mechanisms, while in others, policy development remains in the domain of the government via single-level or dual multisectoral mechanisms.

Some multisectoral food system governance mechanisms are structured to provide *technical advice* but not necessarily to design the policies themselves. These technical-level mechanisms often take shape as a working group or working committee when the purpose is to actively involve a range of (state and sometimes non-state) actors, or simply as supporting units within an agency where resources are not pooled by participants but gathered by a designated team. Ethiopia adopted the former approach, where the Food System Multisectoral Core Team serves as an integrated multisectoral and participatory mechanism. A similar approach was adopted in Mexico, where working committees were established under the National Intersectoral System of Health, Food, Environment, and Competitiveness to bring in the necessary technical expertise. In other countries, a supporting unit is in place, as seen in Yemen, where the Food Security Technical Secretariat provides technical advice to the National Food Security Committee.

As mentioned above, in those cases where *decision making* over the policies was part of the mandate of the multisectoral food system governance institution, sometimes a separate, high-level, more strategically oriented mechanism was set up in addition to the more technical mechanism responsible for policy formulation. For example, in Jordan, the National Food Security Committee formulates policies, and the Higher Council for Food Security makes the final decisions. However, the decision making and policy formulation functions can also be merged, as it happened in Gabon with the National Multisectoral Committee for Food and Nutritional Security.

3.3.3 | Implementation

The aims of several multisectoral food system governance institutions include *coordinating policy and program implementation*. Not surprisingly, these rely heavily on facilitating communication and alignment between government ministries, as seen in Cape Verde, where the Interministerial Council for the Sustainable Food System serves as a single-level multisectoral mechanism. In some countries, this was coupled with coordinating the program implementation of non-state actors, such as UN agencies and NGOs. For example, in Uganda, the National Food System Coordination Committee represents an integrated multisectoral and participatory approach.

A few institutions aim to *coordinate financial resources* to support implementation. Multisectoral mechanisms, such as the Interministerial Council for the Sustainable Food System in Cape Verde, naturally focus on coordinating government resources and external support (Overseas Development Assistance). Participatory approaches were likely to seem useful in facilitating funding from development partners as well, as it is part of the mandates of the Multisectoral and multistakeholder platform for Food and Nutrition Security in Gabon.

3.3.4 | Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation, as well as supplying reports, were frequent roles attached to the multisectoral food system governance institutions, regardless of structure and the extent of non-state actor involvement. For example, in Mexico, the National Intersectoral System of Health, Food, Environment, and Competitiveness has mandates to monitor food production and supply chains, as well as socioeconomic factors and environmental impacts across the food system. It reports annual evaluations of compliance and mitigation actions, and social and environmental impacts. In Timor-Leste and the Dominican Republic, civil society actors are tasked with overseeing how governments, and market and commercial actors, deliver on their commitments.

4 | Discussion

This study mapped existing multisectoral food system governance institutions around the world, offered a typology based on their characteristics, and identified the building blocks of these institutions. Out of 197 countries, we identified 34 with a governance institution that met the inclusion criteria, namely applying a whole-of-government approach to food system governance aimed at delivering environmental, social, and economic outcomes simultaneously. Of these, 10 countries had multisectoral mechanisms, and 20 had mixed multisectoral and participatory governance mechanisms, while 4 had ministries or dedicated units. We analysed these governance institutions using a theoretical framework, focusing on the type of actors involved, their modes of participation, the purpose, mandates, and functions of the institutions, as well as their convening authority and institutional and historical structures. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study conducted to understand the institutions countries adopt to improve multisectoral food system governance.

The results indicate that the establishment of multisectoral food system governance institutions has become increasingly common over the past decade, in conjunction with rising global attention to food systems. In the last 20 years, we have witnessed a shift from a focus on narrow food security perspectives emphasising the need to increase agricultural production and food safety to a broader 'food systems lens' that recognises the need to integrate considerations around nutrition and healthy, equitable, and sustainable diets, social inclusivity, environmental resilience and impact, and sustainable livelihoods across the supply chain (Kraak and Niewolny 2024). This study's findings may suggest either one or both of the following: (i) the UNFSS has generated momentum for governments to strengthen multisectoral food system governance, and/or (ii) the UNFSS manifested to reflect the growing global interest in food system governance. Established governance institutions were more frequently

found in low and middle-income countries compared to high-income countries. This finding reflects the results of prior studies investigating multisectoral food policy making (FAO 2025b; GAIN 2025; Reeve et al. 2024, 2021). However, our study has been the first to systematically report on whole-of-government institutions for food system governance around the world, and the current food system governance literature does not reveal enough evidence about patterns of establishing food system governance institutions across country development levels. Country income levels are often associated with different types of food systems. Lower income countries often have less input-intensive food systems, such as rural and traditional food systems, and tend to have higher rates of food insecure population and lower institutional capacities. Alarcon et al. (2021) suggest that low income countries are more in need of enhanced multisectoral food system coordination because of their often higher food and nutrition security gaps and the high employment rates in food producing sectors. More acute resource constraints in low income governments also make greater coordination a necessity (Bennett et al. 2018; Vince et al. 2024). Moreover, often a range of international development partners and civil society organisations deliver services besides government agencies in lower income countries; hence, it is understandable why multisectoral food system governance institutions were established more often to create greater alignment between this diversity of actors. Accessing donor support also often requires the demonstration of multisectoral collaborative structures (Dodlova 2020). Another reason for more multisectoral food system governance institutions in low- and middle-income countries might be that these mechanisms have been developed to address food insecurity, which is a complex problem that requires a whole-of-system approach. On the other hand, countries with more industrialised and globalised food systems and more complex national governance processes and inflexible instructional structures might face greater challenges with aligning diverse actors, which increases the perceived necessity for a multisectoral food system governance institution. It is important to note that although low and middle income countries might have multisectoral food policy mechanisms in place, these might not necessarily generate meaningful engagement between sectors (Grace 2015; Mumah et al. 2025; Reeve et al. 2021). Thus, it will be essential to conduct further research to investigate how impactful and effective the identified whole-of-government institutions for food system governance are.

4.1 | Insights on the Design of Multisectoral Food System Governance Institutions

This study found that a range of different institutions is being applied to food system governance, in terms of form of institutions (ministry or mechanism), type (consultative, executive), and non-state actor engagement (agenda setting, decision making, accountability). This demonstrates that there is no 'one size fits all' solution when strengthening food system governance, which is very dependent on the make-up of state and non-state actors. Ten mechanisms included only government agencies as core members, while 20 mechanisms were set up with some level of participatory governance and thus included selected non-state actors. The type of non-state actors engaged varied across countries, and in some instances, it was guided by considerations of conflicts of interest and power asymmetries. The fact that more than half of the mechanisms involve non-state actors suggests that governments have been adopting a whole-of-food system approach to food system governance, recognising the need for dialogue and connection across food supply chain actors (D Patay et al. 2025). The wide variety in non-state actor involvement (CSOs, UN agencies, bilateral donors, big food corporations, private sector actors, etc.) might also reflect, first, the absence of a global consensus on who should be involved in food system governance and how; and second, the possibility that different institutions are better suited for other national contexts. Evaluating the effectiveness of the identified mechanisms and comparing them to multisectoral-only mechanisms would provide insights into which institutions are more likely to support effective and transformative food system governance.

4.1.1 | Approaches to Non-State Actor Engagement

It is encouraging that several countries have recognised the need for differentiated engagement of non-state actors in food system governance. Rather than involving all actors uniformly, these countries have set rules specifying which actors are engaged and at what stages of the policy process. Involving a greater number or wider variety of non-state actors is not necessarily beneficial (Frank 2021; McKeon 2017; Patay and Gonzalez 2023; Patay, Ralston, et al. 2023; Patay, Schram, and Friel 2023). On the contrary, formalised involvement of non-state actors who already have considerable undue influence on policy makers (i.e., big food corporations) can exacerbate existing power asymmetries and potentially increase the risk of regulatory capture or corruption (J. Clapp 2023; Jennifer Clapp et al. 2025; Fanzo et al. 2021; Parker et al. 2019). It is therefore essential that policy makers consider the purpose (i.e., functions) of engagement mechanisms and assess potential conflicts of interest and undue for-profit advocacy. Tools such as the draft World Health Organization approach for the prevention and management of conflicts of interest in the policy development and implementation of nutrition programmes at country level (PAHO 2021) can be valuable in this regard.

The degree of formal decision-making authority granted to non-state actors can also be carefully chosen, as it has been done in Chad, where only selected NGOs are included in the Technical Committee for National Coordination for the preparations for the UNFSS. Encouragingly, it is possible to incorporate non-state actor engagement and adopt whole-of-society approaches to food system governance without granting more power to large food industry or agribusiness actors (Gilmore et al. 2023). For instance, some countries, such as Mexico, have explicitly excluded large food industry actors, and others, like Ecuador, have opted to include only small and medium-sized enterprises. The latter offers a compelling example of how typically less powerful, smaller actors can be empowered through formal inclusion in food system governance processes (Fraser 1990; Mann 2019).

The inclusion of civil society actors to oversee the governments' and market and commercial sector action in food systems, as

we see in Timor Leste or the Dominican Republic, resonates with calls for greater accountability (Covic et al. 2021; Garton et al. 2022). Civil society organisations may have legitimacy to participate in food system governance arising from their role in directly representing communities or the public. However, these actors often have fewer opportunities to engage with or influence policymakers, especially in comparison with large food industry actors who tend to find informal ways to ensure that their interests are met (Mann 2019). Hence, providing formal roles to civil society organisations in governance mechanisms might help close the gap of power between civil society and market and commercial actors (Covic et al. 2021; Garton et al. 2022; D Patay et al. 2025).

In lower-income level countries, development partners, such as UN agencies, are frequently included in the food system governance mechanisms. These agencies might be seen as natural partners as they have already been supporting government agencies on food system-related initiatives with technical or financial assistance. However, including them in the national governing mechanisms could compromise their neutrality as interlocutors of multiple constituencies by being associated with the ruling party. Academic institutions were also involved in the governance mechanisms of some countries, such as Timor Leste, due to their role as a source of evidence and technical information.

4.1.2 | Custom-Fitting Governance Institutions: The Use of Building Blocks

Nine building blocks were identified that reflect the purpose and function of the established institutions. However, it is worth noting that the inclusion of more building blocks in a governance approach does not necessarily indicate greater effectiveness or transformative potential. A higher number of building blocks increases complexity, and thus, it might potentially lead to higher administrative costs and a greater need for strong convening authority to ensure effective implementation. Hence, some governments may have strategically opted for more streamlined institutions with fewer functions.

When a government seeks to integrate all policy cycle functions under a single structure, establishing a stand-alone agency, such as the Ministry of Food in Bangladesh, might seem warranted. However, this monocentric governance approach (Candel and Pereira 2017; Wisniewski 2013) may create challenges by reassigning responsibilities from existing sectoral ministries that are often best positioned to plan and implement policies in their respective areas. Thus, consolidating all these mandates into a new ministry may not be the most effective approach. An alternative institution has been implemented by Indonesia, which adopted a polycentric approach (Boukharta et al. 2024; Candel and Pereira 2017): a *Coordinating* Ministry of Food Affairs. This approach retained existing responsibilities across the food system within sector-specific agencies, while providing a coordination mechanism to enable oversight and facilitate coherence.

Such suprasectoral governance institutions, when an agency receives the mandate to oversee or coordinate other sectoral ministries and actors across policy sectors, often with a mandate by the head of government (such as Prime Minister or President), seem to be common. This aligns with the theory of institutional collective action, which suggests that the more complex a collaboration is, the higher convening authority is needed to bring all government agencies together (Feiock 2013; Kim et al. 2020). Studies on multisectoral collaboration have shown that suprasectoral agencies are more likely to successfully engage with usually influential ministries, such as Finance or Trade and Industry, alongside typically less influential ones, like Health or Environment (Patay and Gonzalez 2023; Patay, Ralston, et al. 2023; Patay, Schram, and Friel 2023; Reeve et al. 2021).

Potentially, a suprasectoral ministry with a more exclusive mandate has more resources to fulfil its food systems coordinating role. Its position at the suprasectoral level, overseeing the work of sectoral ministries, can increase its ability to meaningfully bring the relevant ministries together. Future research could explore whether such configurations in practice lead to more effective coordination and better outcomes in countries that have adopted this model.

4.2 | Strengths and Limitations

This is the first study to systematically describe food systems governance institutions globally. By drawing on documentary information verified by in-country experts, we were able to document and typologise a wide range of structures and mechanisms. Policy documents were often not available publicly; many of them were only found as grey (unpublished) papers, which made the identification of relevant multisectoral governance institutions difficult in the case of some countries. This was mitigated by validation by in-country contacts who shared policy documents or referred the team to the relevant sources. Furthermore, the use of the AI-powered search tool (Perplexity.ai) supplemented our traditional search methods and helped capture data sources that traditional database searches might have missed. However, the results presented by Perplexity.ai had to be carefully checked and verified by the research team to screen out potential inaccuracies. All in all, the validation with country contacts has helped to prove that our data collection approach was effective, as only a few additional institutions were pointed out. Finally, in-country contacts had sometimes limited time or resources to respond to enquiries, and there might have been communication or cultural barriers while engaging across 197 countries, which potentially resulted in misunderstandings about the type of institutions the researchers were looking for or the criteria for their inclusion. These were mitigated by contacting several in-country contacts across state and non-state agencies. Finally, our analysis is based on enacted or written institutional settings that may or may not be implemented in practice or not fully implemented.

5 | Conclusions

This study comprehensively investigated national level institutions to multisectoral food system governance worldwide and

found that 34 countries have a whole-of-government or whole-of-food system governance institution in place. Our findings provide new insights to support governments worldwide in developing or strengthening their existing governance structures and expanding institutional mandates to govern food systems beyond the ministries of agriculture (Farmery et al. 2025). The identified institutions demonstrate great diversity across the types of actors involved, the ways they are engaged, the purpose, mandates, and functions of the institutions, as well as convening authority and institutional structures. The recognition that not all non-state actors should be engaged in the same way in whole-of-food system approaches is a particularly welcome development (D Patay et al. 2025).

There is a significant opportunity for future research to extend this analysis by examining the effectiveness of different institutions in addressing critical issues of food system transformation and policy coherence. This study also provides useful foundations for future research aimed at deepening understanding of how country characteristics and other contextual factors, such as the local political economy, types of food systems, or the influence of non-state actors, shape the design of multisectoral food system governance institutions.

The present study may thus inform policymakers and non-state actors by presenting a range of options governments have in terms of the purpose, functions, structure, membership, and roles, encouraging 'custom fitted' institutions to food system governance reflecting country context and needs and profiting from the use of existing institutions. Policymakers may also decide to explore certain countries' institutions in greater depth, particularly those that align with their country income level, characteristics of the food system, or type of government. Country-to-country exchange experiences (such as those under the UN-led South–South and Triangular Cooperation schemes) may be relevant to learn from each other's institutional settings. Given the wide variety of social, economic, and political contexts, it is unlikely that a single 'best practice' multisectoral governance approach will emerge in the coming years to steer food systems transition pathways (Schneider et al. 2025). However, there is great value for governments in learning from each other and continuing to develop and refine their approaches to whole-of-food system governance.

Author Contributions

Dori Patay: conceptualisation, methods, data collection and analysis, writing – first draft. **Holly Rippin:** conceptualisation, methods, data collection and analysis, writing – review and editing. **Gastón Ares:** data collection and analysis, writing – review and editing. **Erica Reeve:** conceptualisation, methods, analysis, writing – review and editing, funding acquisition. **Carolina Venegas Hargous:** analysis, writing – review and editing. **Penny Farrell:** conceptualisation, methods, writing – review and editing. **Belinda Reeve:** conceptualisation, writing – review and editing, funding acquisition. **Jose-Luis Vivero-Pol:** writing – review and editing. **Anne Marie Thow:** conceptualisation, methods, writing – review and editing, funding acquisition, supervision.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study is available on request from the corresponding author.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **File S1:** The type of non-state actors engaged in the multisectoral food system governance mechanisms (coloured cells indicate involvement). **File S2:** The building blocks of multisectoral food system governance institutions (blue indicates the use of building block).