# Shaping food security narratives

## A strategic tool for climate action

March 2026

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# Acronyms

**ABA** – Brazilian Association of Agroecology

**ABAG** – Brazilian Agribusiness Association

**AfCETA** – African Continental Free Trade Area

**AfDB** – African Development Bank

**AFSA** – Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

**AGRA** – Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

**AMAN** – Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (Indonesia)

**APP** – Agricultural Promotion Policy (Nigeria)

**ASTGS** – Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (Kenya)

**AU** – African Union

**AUC** – African Union Commission

**BAPPENAS** – National Development Planning Agency (Indonesia)

**BCCSAP** – Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

**BRAC** – Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

**CAADP** – Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme

**CAP** – country action plan

**CBD** – Convention on Biological Diversity

**CELAC** – Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

**CFS** – Committee on World Food Security

**CGIAR** – formerly the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research

**CIAT** – International Center for Tropical Agriculture (now part of Alliance Biodiversity International)

**CIDA** – Canadian International Development Agency

**CIFOR** – Center for International Forestry Research

**CLOC**-Via Campensina — Latin American Coordinator of RURAL Organizations

**CoFTI** – Coalition for Food Systems Transformation in India

**CONTAG** – National Confederation of Rural Workers (Brazil)

**COP** – Conference of the Parties

**CSA** – Climate-smart agriculture

**CSIPM** – Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism

**CSO** – Civil society organization

**DAERA** – Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

**DEFRA** – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)

**DWP** – Department for Work and Pensions (UK)

**ECOWAS** - Economic Community of West African States

**EU** – European Union

**FAO** – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**FSPI** – Federation of Indonesian Peasant Union

**GAIN** – Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

**GMO** – genetically modified organism

**HLPE** – High-Level Panel of Experts

**IDRC** – International Development Research Center

**IFPRI** – International Food Policy Research Institute

**IPBES** – International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

**IPCC** – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

**IUCN** – International Union for Conservation of Nature

**MASAF** – Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests (Italy)

**MST** – Landless Rural Workers Movement (Brazil)

**NAFTA** – North America Free Trade Agreement

**NAP** – National adaptation plan

**NDCs** – Nationally determined contributions

**NFSA** – National Food Security Act (India)

**NGO** – non-governmental organization

**NMSA** – National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (India)

**NSPAN** – National Strategic Plan for Action on Nutrition (Nigeria)

**PAA** – Food Acquisition Programme (PAA)

**PELUM** -- Participatory Ecological Land Use Management

**PENSSAN** – Food and Nutrition Security Network (Brazil)

**PNAE** – National School Feeding Programme

**PNAPO** – National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (Brazil)

**RISE** – Rural Investment for a Sustainable Europe

**SCAR** – Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (EU)

**SDG** – Sustainable Development Goals

**SISAN** – National Food and Nutrition Security Programme (Brazil)

**SNAP** – Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program

**SOFI** – State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World

**SUN** – Scaling-up Nutrition

**TPDS** – Targeted Public Distribution System (India)

**UBINIG** – Policy Research for Development Alternative

**UEMOA** – West African Economic and Monetary Union

**UK** – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

**UN** – United Nations

**UNCCC** – United Nations Climate Change Conference

**UNFSS** – United Nations Food Systems Summit

**UNICEF** – United Nations Children's Fund

**USAID** – United States Agency for International Development

**USDA** - United States Department of Agriculture

**USMCA** – US-Mexico-Canada Agreement

**VACS** – Vision for Adapted Crops and Soil (USA)

**WALHI** – Indonesian Forum for the Environment

**WBCSD** – World Business Council for Sustainable Development

**WEF** – World Economic Forum

**WFP** – World Food Programme

**WHO** – World Health Organization

**WTO** – World Trade Organization

# Executive summary

## The current state of global food security

Hunger levels rose by **113.4 million people** between 2019 and 2021, and have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

**2.3 billion** people faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024.

**673.2 million** were underbourished in 2024.

These statistics are from the United Nations' State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025, which acknowledges four dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability (FAO et al, 2025). Even where food is available, food insecurity can exist where poverty, inequality or weak infrastructure impede access. Utilization emphasizes nutrition and food safety, while stability refers to reliable food access, even following shocks (Guiné et al, 2021).

An important shift is underway to introduce two new dimensions: agency and sustainability (HLPE, 2020). This conceptualization reflects emerging understanding that food security also hinges on power, participation and ecological balance.

### FOOD SECURITY IS A CLIMATE ISSUE

Food insecurity has surged in recent years, driven by geopolitical conflicts, climate change, economic disruptions, the enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural resource constraints. According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 report, food security has been a key political issue globally since 2020 due to rising food prices. While some of this inflation has been driven by shocks in agricultural and energy commodity markets, the report points to the concentration of corporate power in the food system as a key reason why food prices remain high despite the costs of inputs easing (FAO et al, 2025).

The issue of food security is heavily intertwined with climate. Impacts such as shifting weather patterns and degraded soils can pose serious threats to agricultural productivity and food system resilience. At the same time, food systems currently account for roughly 30 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions globally, with emissions from agricultural production (primarily methane and nitrous oxide) on the rise since 2000 (WRI, 2025).

Despite this interconnection, food security and climate action are too often treated as separate or even conflicting agendas – when in fact the potential for climate mitigation offered by food systems transformation cannot be overstated. According to the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable and Just Food Systems, even with a complete global transition away from fossil fuels, food systems could still push temperatures beyond 1.5°C – but transforming food systems by 2050 could cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 percent by 2050 compared to 2020 levels (Rockström et al, 2025).

Food security discussions are shaped by competing narratives – that is, the way people talk about and understand food security, what they see as being the main problems, the solutions envisaged, and underlying norms, values and assumptions. Which food security narratives are dominant determines who has power within the food system, meaning narratives can be – and are – used as a tool for concentrating power.

Food security narratives ultimately determine which policies receive funding, which technologies are scaled and which communities are empowered or left behind. For climate philanthropy, understanding these narratives is essential – particularly at a time when food security narratives are being weaponized to oppose climate action in areas including the USA and Europe. Intervening at the narrative level offers a powerful way to influence the entire food and climate ecosystem. It offers the opportunity to build broader alliances and public support around measures that increase food security while simultaneously advancing climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

This document examines how philanthropic funders can leverage food security narratives for climate impact.

## DEFINING FOOD SECURITY NARRATIVES

Food security narratives are inherently complex and resist neat classification, often shifting in form and meaning depending on who is using them. This complexity makes classifying food security narratives challenging. However, within this research some classification has been necessary to enable cross-country and regional analysis – even if the narrative types are porous, with many overlaps, interactions and shifting boundaries between them. Food security narratives are, by their very nature, in a constant state of flux.

The figure below sets out 14 narrative types, outlining their main tenets and indicating which groups of actors they are typically used by. The typology we present here – developed through review of the literature in multiple countries and regions – is intended as an analytical tool and an initial subjective evaluation rather than a definitive framework. We intend for it to spark debate and discussion among philanthropic funders around how food security narratives can be harnessed and amplified – or effectively countered – to build support for climate action.

# A typology of food security narratives

## Protectionist

**Key arguments**

- International trade as a threat to national food security.
- Need for protectionist policies that penalize imports and promote domestic production.

**Typically used by:**
National governments

## Deregulation

**Key arguments**

- Food insecurity is a result of market inefficiency.
- Liberalizing trade and reducing regulations will boost farmer incomes and reduce poverty.

**Typically used by:**
National governments, private sector

## Right to food

**Key arguments**

- Access to adequate food is a fundamental and legal human right.
- Governments have a binding obligation to ensure their people are fed.

**Typically used by:**
UN, FAO, some national governments, NGOs, think tanks, anti-poverty advocacy groups

## Productivist

**Key arguments**

- Food security through increased production,often through technological innovation and high-yield staples.
- Feeding a growing population while driving economic growth.

**Typically used by:**
Governments, private sector (agri-tech), research institutes, large farm lobby

## Global North responsiblity

**Key arguments**

- Wealthy Global North countries have a duty to ensure global food security.
- Global food security is vital to humanitarian goals and national security.

**Typically used by:**
National governments (but declining), aid agencies, NGOs

## Civil food resilience

**Key arguments**

- 'Whole of society' approach needed where citizens are prepared to act collectively to ensure everyone remains fed during and after crises.

**Typically used by:**
Academics, local governments, local food partnerships/food policy councils

## Food systems transformation

**Key arguments**

- Food security can't be achieved through 'business as usual'
- Requires fundamental, integrated overhaul of entire food system to one that is healthy, equitable, and sustainable for all

**Typically used by:**
UN agencies, academics, national governments, local governments, NGOs, private sector

## Nutrition and health

**Key arguments**

- Food security requires people to have access not only to sufficient calories but to affordable, safe and diverse diets that are essential for good health.
- Climate change and conflict can impair access to nutritious foods.

**Typically used by:**
UN agencies, funders, research institutes, private sector (agritech), NGOs

## Food trade

**Key arguments**

- Open markets and international trade are essential for ensuring stable and sufficient food supply across regions.
- Trade ensures sufficient food supply amid climate, conflict and economic shocks.

**Typically used by:**
WTO, WEF, national governments, private sector

## Localization & sub-national

**Key arguments**

- Local and regional actors are better positioned to understand and address specific drivers of food insecurity within communities.

**Typically used by:**
Local governments, NGOs / CSOs, academics, local private sector

## Food sovereignty

**Key arguments**

- Genuine food security requires that those who produce, distribute, and consume food have democratic control over their own food systems.
- Food sovereignty is a prerequisite for food security.

**Typically used by:**
Grassroots social movements, farmers and workers orgs, CSOs, some farmers, academia, governments

## Agroecology

**Key arguments**

- Food security is possible through farming systems that work in harmony with ecological principles.
- Focus on long-term sustainability.
- Food security is durable only if ecosystems can recover from shocks.

**Typically used by:**
Grassroots social movements, smallholder groups, environmental NGOs, academics, Indigenous groups, local governments

## Planetary health

**Key arguments**

- Long-term food security is only possible if we adopt diets that are healthy for people and ecologically sustainable within planetary boundaries.

**Typically used by:**
Academics, NGOs, local governments, national governments

## Climate resilience & justice

**Key arguments**

- We must build resilience to climate events and other stresses through the food system, which can have a dramatic effect on food security, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Maintaining food security requires minimizing disruption to domestic and imported food supplies.

**Typically used by:**
Governments (especially regarding supply chains), resilience/planning departments, international NGOs / CSOs, Indigenous groups

## WHY IS UNDERSTANDING THESE NARRATIVES KEY TO ADVANCING CLIMATE ACTION?

Understanding narratives will help climate-focused philanthropic funders find new ways to build support for climate action across political and geographical divides, and among diverse stakeholder groups.

For example, the dominant food security narrative is productivist[1]– that is, focusing on increasing yields to feed a growing population and drive economic growth. The productivist narrative is used by agritech and meat and dairy companies to make the case for continuing use of agrochemicals, downplaying their impacts on climate, biodiversity and human health. Companies may also use resilience narratives in the wake of climate events and as part of a sales pitch to farmers (who may take out loans to afford agritech products), but from the perspective of safeguarding yields in the short term.

The use of the productivist narrative to justify agrochemical use is also intrinsically linked to the proliferation of monocultures, which has significant implications for soil health, biodiversity and nutrition. A laser focus on maximizing yields overlooks quality of nutrition, with calorie increases prioritized over nutrient density. The same goes for crop diversity, the absence of which has a direct impact on both health and biodiversity – and therefore long-term resilience. Reframing food security around a narrative that emphasizes the necessity of building long-term resilience – particularly with the sovereignty of local communities at the fore – could shift the mindsets of policymakers, supporting them to repurpose resources away from subsidizing agrochemical use and monocrop production, and towards encouraging ecologically friendly practices that build healthy soil and ward off pests naturally.

Production and use of nitrogen fertilizers account for around 5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions; agrochemical reduction presents a significant area of impact for philanthropic funders focused on climate mitigation. At the same time, it presents opportunities for funders focused on climate adaptation and resilience, with agroecological and regenerative practices such as crop diversification and composting to improve soil health, water retention and biodiversity.

This is just one example of where food security narratives can be leveraged for impact towards climate mitigation goals. It illustrates how an understanding of food security narratives and how they are wielded by different actors can be a critical tool for climate philanthropy.

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[1] The productivist narrative is also known as productionist. These terms are interchangeable, as are the nouns productivism and productionism.

## HOW ARE DIFFERENT GROUPS USING FOOD SECURITY NARRATIVES?

For philanthropic organizations seeking to align food security and climate agendas, it is critical to understand the landscape of narrative use, including the aims and tactics involved. This will allow them to scrutinize narrative claims and question power dynamics, but also to employ tactics themselves to amplify local voices and convene around shared narratives that boost food security and climate action.

Our research identified three main types of narrative use:

- **Strategic.** Stakeholders deliberately deploy food security narratives to justify specific policies, promote certain solutions or advance institutional interests.

  **The private sector shapes favourable business environments**
  The private sector uses narratives to advance its interests. In the Global North, large agricultural firms use narratives of geopolitical stability and "feeding the world" to justify investment in industrial monocultures. Across all regions, companies use productivist narratives emphasizing yield, efficiency and technological progress to promote their products and R&D agendas. These tactics are often used strategically during climate crises to position corporate solutions as essential for agricultural resilience – and therefore food security.

- **Communicative**. Stakeholders tailor narratives to resonate with specific audiences through targeted advocacy or media campaigns.

  **NGOs and allies use narratives to shift public opinion and influence policymakers**
  International organizations use narratives in reports and thought-leadership pieces that are widely disseminated across traditional and social media. Organizations' reputations and public relations capacities can result in significant shifts in public opinion and policy. However, their impact can be reduced by counter-campaigns intended to discredit their messages. For example, following the 2019 EAT-Lancet report on healthy diets from sustainable food systems, the Animal Agriculture Alliance, a coalition of meat and dairy industry stakeholders, hired a PR firm to discredit the report, its authors and its funders.

- **Interpretive**. Stakeholders adapt, reframe and change the meaning of narratives to suit their own interests.

**Co-option and narrative drift can serve users' interests**

A number of terms are used by multiple stakeholder groups to represent opposing concepts. This creates "narrative drift" when original, transformative intentions are co-opted by more dominant paradigms, such as the private sector creating a favourable business environment. For instance, the term "climate-smart agriculture" (CSA) was defined by FAO as a way to sustainably increase productivity and resilience while reducing greenhouse gases. However, profit-driven agritech firms like Syngenta and Monsanto also use the term while promoting synthetic agrochemicals and industrial monocropping, undermining the vision of social movements and academics.

## HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY USE FOOD SECURITY NARRATIVES STRATEGICALLY FOR IMPACT?

With such a diversity of narratives in play, it begs the question: how can philanthropy determine which will be the most effective narratives to harness for climate impact?

To answer this question, it is necessary to consider which narratives are reinforcing the status quo and which can have the most impact in upending it. Deeply engrained productivist and related narratives have an outsized influence globally, primarily through the use of these narratives to justify policies and practices that perpetuate the concentration of corporate power in the food system. Thus, the most effective intervention is not to directly oppose productivist narratives but to strategically elevate and resource alternatives.

This includes supporting and elevating "local" narratives that are rooted in lived experience – such as food sovereignty, agroecology and civil food resilience – and using these to mitigate the impact of narratives that are not advancing the climate agenda. Simultaneously, philanthropic funders should work to expose the gap between productivist climate rhetoric and actual climate outcomes, showing how corporate-driven "solutions" can perpetuate the very systems driving emissions.

Philanthropic funders and civil society will need to work together to identify and test the most effective narratives and messengers that will resonate with key decision-makers. This process will involve systematic efforts across multiple regions to ensure messaging is locally grounded, while also laddering up to a coordinated, aligned approach to challenging dominant narratives.

Central to this process is identifying the key political moments that provide opportunities for narrative shifts, and ensuring preparedness to seize these opportunities. It is also crucial to consider who is delivering narratives and to whom. For narratives to land, the right messenger is required – and establishing the most credible messenger requires a deep understanding of the target audience's motivations and world view. For policymakers, for example, we found that

private sector champions can be extremely effective messengers – as can respected peers in the policy space who understand the context within which they are working.

Our research found that scale matters. While the narratives of grassroots actors and marginalized groups are often undervalued at the national level – due to power imbalances and a tendency to devalue knowledge based on lived experience – at the local level they gain more support. Philanthropic funding will therefore be most effective when it is directed to country and sub-national initiatives that prioritize communities' lived experience. These narratives can subsequently have global impact, bringing geographically distant communities together through shared experiences.

**We have identified six areas in which philanthropy can create the most impact when engaging with and shaping food security narratives.**

1. Establish locally managed funding mechanisms for stakeholders and communities to determine their own priority issues and solutions, and to allocate budget accordingly.

2. Establish localized research systems and knowledge co-creation with Indigenous Peoples and communities.

3. Provide funding for direct and meaningful community participation and advocacy in global arenas.

4. Enable training and capacity building in strategic communications and media skills, cross-sector fluency and food systems, legal processes and political strategy, coalition-building, leadership and relationship management.

5. Shore up communications capabilities and knowledge platforms.

6. Promote massive awareness-building accompanied by support and training packages to help smallholders navigate the transition to practices that promote climate resilience and mitigation.

## HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY SHIFT FOOD SECURITY NARRATIVES?

Once the philanthropic community has identified the narratives that will have the most impact with key decision-makers — and the messengers whose voices will resonate most effectively — attention must move to identifying opportunities to deploy these narratives.

Below, we outline seven strategies for harnessing food security narratives to advance climate action, with specific sub-strategies listed under each. The subsequent table identifies six types of opportunities and indicates which strategies and sub-strategies can be applied.

### Media and communications

- Unified messaging
- Human storytelling
- Building media relationships
- Press events and media briefings
- Social media campaigns

### Embedding in policy documents

- Quietly embedding narratives to ensure institutional permanence

### Changing cultures and practices

- Working with and through existing sectoral support organizations
- Moving out of echo chambers through offline strategies

### Building alliances and solidarity

- Broad-based movements to mobilize public support
- Create alliances for mutual solidarity

### Multistakeholder platforms and processes

- Engaging in platforms and networks
- Strong leadership and trust-building
- Co-learning and systems thinking

### Generating and using evidence

- Research can provide credible evidence
- Effective use of evidence is crucial

### Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning

- Early proactive strategic engagement
- Participation in consultations
- Visual, tailored, evidence-based policy briefs
- Using multiple channels (side events, face to face meetings, retreats etc.)
- Identifying and engaging champions
- Adapting language for political contexts

# Opportunities and strategies for deploying food security narratives for climate action

| Opportunity | Examples | Tactics and considerations for leverage | Strategies to deploy |
|---|---|---|---|
| External events and crises that prompt public dialogue shifts. | • Climate-related shocks (floods, storms, drought)<br>• Pandemics — e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic<br>• Social movements, e.g. the racial justice movement in the USA, which has made space for food-related narratives centered on justice<br>• Geopolitical events — e.g. Ukraine war, Brexit | Organizations can use events to connect food security narratives and climate action.<br><br>One caveat is that these opportunities may be short lived, and once the situation returns to 'normal' new narratives may be swiftly abandoned if not sufficiently embedded. | Media and communications<br>Building alliances and solidarity |
| Ongoing global governance spaces and processes allow for continuous influence. | • The Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism (CSIPM) of the Committee for Food Security (CFS) shapes "soft" legislation and guidance<br>• The FAO Global roadmap on achieving SDG2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold was a multi-year process culminating in the launch of country action plans (CAPs) at COP30<br>• The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Biennial Review offers formal spaces for non-state actor involvement and advocacy | Actively identify existing and emerging spaces for engagement at the global, regional, national and local levels — or convene new spaces. | Media and communications: Relationship-building with media; social media campaigns<br>Multistakeholder platforms and processes<br>Building alliances and solidarity |
| Global and regional/ continental summits and events offer advocacy moments. | • UNFCCC COP<br>• CBD COP<br>• Africa Food Systems Forum | Insert food security considerations into climate commitments.<br><br>Introduce narratives that tie food systems to emissions, biodiversity and justice (thereby moving beyond adaptation to mitigate the climate impacts of agriculture). | Media and communications: Unified messaging; storytelling; press and media events; social media<br>Early strategic engagement, including pre-event discussions; visual, tailored and evidence-based policy briefs; multiple channels<br>Generating and using evidence<br>Building alliances and solidarity |

| Opportunity | Examples | Tactics and considerations for leverage | Strategies to deploy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political moments, including electoral cycles and anniversaries, create windows for new narratives. | • Election cycles<br>• Political transitions<br>• Anniversaries of major events | Key political moments can present opportunities for new narratives to be included in manifestos and campaign platforms. This can play into the desire of new governments to distinguish themselves from what came before.<br><br>Caution is advised over aligning narratives too closely to one political party, lest it is thrown out by a successor who wishes to break ties with the past. | Media and communications: Human storytelling, building relationships with media; social media campaigns)<br><br>Adapting language for political contexts; identifying and engaging champions<br><br>Building alliances and solidarity: Alliances for mutual solidarity |
| National strategies and plans, including consultations and multistakeholder platforms, offer opportunities for recurring influence. | • Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)<br>• National adaptation plans (NAPs)<br>• National biodiversity strategies<br>• National planning and development policies<br>• National resilience strategies<br>• National agriculture and fisheries strategies provide opportunities for shaping food security narratives through the climate adaptation and mitigation measures that are envisaged and implemented | Engage in the development and review of climate-related strategies and action plans, and advocate for the inclusion of food security considerations.<br><br>Strategies and plans should be seen not as one-off documents but as recurring windows of opportunity, meaning there is potential for continual engagement and incremental improvements over the years to come. | Media and communications<br><br>Multistakeholder platforms and processes; Engaging in platforms, processes and networks<br><br>Early strategic engagement; identifying and engaging champions; adapted language; participating in consultations; visual, tailored, evidence-based policy briefs<br><br>Embedding in policy documents<br><br>Generating and using evidence<br><br>Building alliances and solidarity |
| Working with sectors on an on-going basis allows for gradual influence. | • Particularly relevant when seeking to influence dominant narratives of farmers and certain parts of the private sector, such as consumer food manufacturers that rely on commodities | Existing movements among certain sectors can provide opportunities for ongoing, gradual influence over food security narratives.<br><br>Both farmers and the private sector are deeply concerned about how they can produce sustainably and remain in business, and are therefore seeking solutions and incentives for behavior change. As such, they may be targets for "silver bullets" from venture capital and agri-tech companies that perpetuate productivist narratives for their own profit-driven interests but which are not necessarily in the long-term interests of food producers.<br><br>Long-term work with existing movements can help counter these powerful narratives. | Building alliances and solidarity: Alliances for mutual support<br><br>Working with and through existing sectoral support organizations; moving out of echo chambers through offline strategies |

## TAKEAWAYS

- Food security and climate change are not separate problems, but interconnected parts of a global crisis. Food security narratives are a primary way in which these two agendas may be aligned.

- There is a clear path forward for philanthropy to shape these narratives to create greater, more meaningful alignment between political food security goals and climate action, while also responding to distinct regional needs.

- Alignment depends on building broad and sometimes unconventional coalitions that bridge divides between civil society, farmers' movements, academics and progressive private sector actors. Amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women and smallholder farmers can be particularly powerful.

- Interventions must be timed to take advantage of key opportunities. "Policy windows", such as global summits like UNFCCC COPs, national policy reviews and moments of crisis, create crucial openings to introduce new narratives and influence agendas.

- Shaping narratives effectively requires philanthropic funders and civil society to work together to identify and test the most effective narratives and messengers that will resonate with key decision-makers.

- The credibility of the messenger is paramount, and choice of messengers must be underpinned by an understanding of the target audience.

- Successful narratives blend credible, quantifiable evidence with relatable, human-centric storytelling. This involves moving beyond technical jargon and using language that connects with the values of a specific audience, whether that is economic stability for policymakers, secure livelihoods for farmers, or social justice for communities.

- The most effective narratives are not imposed globally but are instead grounded in local and regional realities.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Food security narratives and why they matter for climate philanthropy

Food insecurity has surged in recent years, driven by climate change, geopolitical conflicts, economic disruptions, the enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural resource constraints. In 2024, an estimated 2.3 billion people faced moderate or severe food insecurity, and 673.2 million were undernourished.  Hunger levels rose by 113.4 million people between 2019 and 2021 and have yet to return to re-pandemic levels (FAO et al, 2025).

Food security and climate change are closely interconnected. Climate change impacts – ranging from shifting weather patterns and degraded soils to disrupted supply chains and increased food prices – pose serious threats to agricultural productivity and food system resilience. At the same time, food systems currently account for roughly 30 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions globally (FAOSTAT, 2024).

Despite the interconnection, food security and climate mitigation and adaptation are rarely viewed through a holistic lens. Too often they are treated as separate, or even conflicting, agendas. This disconnect means that climate philanthropists can inadvertently reinforce productivist narratives that prioritize efficiency and yields while overlooking deeper structural transformations. The potential for climate mitigation offered by food systems transformation cannot be overstated. According to the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable and Just Food Systems (Rockström et al, 2025), even with a complete global transition away from fossil fuels, food systems could still push temperatures beyond 1.5°C. On the other hand, transforming food systems by 2050 could cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60% compared to 2020 levels.

**Climate mitigation** addresses the drivers of climate change (such as greenhouse gas emissions), thereby preventing (or reducing the gravity of) climate impacts on food systems and supporting long-term food security.

Food-related climate mitigation efforts generally focus on efficiency, such as increasing and intensifying production using fewer inputs and with lower C02 emissions. Far less consideration is given to alternative approaches, such as land use transformation, waste reduction or re-shaping demand, nor the accessibility to, and interests of, smallholder farmers. For climate philanthropy, this means that funding decisions must carefully assess whether proposed solutions address emissions at the systems level or merely optimize existing high-emissions approaches.

**Climate adaptation** is geared towards changing practices so that food systems stakeholders, assets and infrastructure are better able to cope with unavoidable climate change impacts so that food security can be maintained.

Policy approaches to climate adaptation frequently overlook the limits of conventional agricultural systems to adapt to the projected impacts of climate change, as highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023). While some multinational initiatives on food security acknowledge the climate threat, they tend to lack detail on the precise actions or approaches that will make global, regional and local food systems more resilient to climate change, climate friendly, diverse, nutritious and equitable. As a result, proposed solutions are likely to recycle past frameworks that have failed to deliver systemic change.

The rising tide of food insecurity has sparked increased political debate at global, national and local levels about how to ensure that “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996). Food security is viewed not just as a technical objective but also as a political agenda and a way of determining actions.

According to the 2025 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, food security has been a key political issue globally since 2020 due to rising food prices (FAO et al, 2025). While some of this inflation has been driven by shocks in agricultural and energy commodity markets, the report points to the concentration of corporate power in the food system as a key reason why food prices remain high despite the costs of inputs easing.

**Discussions are shaped by competing narratives – that is, the way people talk about and understand food security, what they see as being the main problems, the solutions envisaged and underlying norms, values and assumptions.** Which food security narratives are dominant determines who has power within the food system, meaning narratives are used as a powerful tool for concentrating power.

**What is a narrative?**

There is no single agreed-upon definition of "narrative" that is relevant for this report. However, drawing on research in narrative policy studies, we use the term narrative to refer to a story constructed by actors to make sense of the world, guide their actions and influence the behaviour of other actors (Jones and McBeth, 2010). More specifically, a narrative is a way of describing problems and solutions that reflects specific assumptions, values and power relations, and can be used strategically by different actors to advance their interests.

Narratives play a fundamental role in shaping how people perceive, interpret and respond to complex issues. The way stories are constructed, and how certain elements are emphasized, can shape policy, public understanding and the direction of social change.

Food security narratives help determine which policies receive funding, which technologies are scaled, and which communities are empowered or left behind. **For climate philanthropy, understanding these narratives is essential,** particularly at a time when food security narratives are being weaponized to oppose climate action in areas including the USA and Europe. Intervening at the narrative level offers a powerful way to influence the entire food and climate ecosystem.

It offers the opportunity to build broader alliances and public support around measures that increase food security while simultaneously advancing climate adaptation and mitigation goals – and ensuring that the interests of smallholder farmers and vulnerable populations are not overlooked.

This report is based on the premise that strategic philanthropic investment can be a deciding factor in the evolution of narratives. It directly addresses the central question facing funders in this space:

**How can food security narratives be shaped to create greater alignment between political food security and climate action agendas, while addressing regional needs and priorities?**

In the current context of geopolitical change, food security narratives are more important than ever. The global repercussions of the United States' second Trump Administration on food security narratives and climate commitments cannot be overstated. This research has come at a time of major reconfiguration from a global leader, where previously the United States saw itself as responsible for combatting global food insecurity in the interests of maintaining global stability. Moves such as cutting the domestic Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the decimation of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), are already having a significant impact on food security domestically and in low-income countries – and will continue to do so.

Moreover, these US shifts appear to be part of an emerging trend among other countries of the Global North towards cutting development budgets. In the last year cuts have been announced by the governments of the Netherlands (citing a focus on Dutch interests, trade and economy, security and stability, and migration), Switzerland (due to increased military spending, financial impact of Covid-19, the global energy crisis and the war in Ukraine) and the United Kingdom (in favour of the defence budget).

A major issue for philanthropic foundations is where to channel resources towards damage limitation through influencing political thinking or wider advocacy, or to keep other narratives in play so that they can be reasserted when political thinking swings back.

The report is structured as follows:

The remainder of section one traces the evolution of food security definitions over the last 50 years, including the emergence of more nuanced understandings over access, nutrition, sustainability and agency, and drivers of food insecurity. A short sub-section explains the methodology adopted for the research that informed this report.

Section two presents the key findings of the research. In 2.1 we propose a "porous typology" of main narrative types, for analytical purposes, before presenting observations in global trends in food security narratives in 2.2. This is followed by an examination of how these narratives are

used by governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agribusinesses and the media to advance the goals of certain stakeholder groups, in 2.3.

Sub-section 2.4 identifies opportunities for shaping food security narratives to promote climate action, and strategies for addressing them. Sub-section 2.5 identifies clear needs and capacity gaps in shaping food-security narratives that also advance climate goals and makes a series of recommendations to philanthropic foundations.

Section 3 offers a concise conclusion to the central question addressed by the research.

The main body of the report is complemented by two annexes. Annex 1 gives further details of the food security narrative types identified in different parts of the word. Annex 2 examines the relative dominance of different narratives in different parts of the world.

## 1.2 Evolving definitions of food security

The concept of food security has evolved significantly since it first emerged in global policy debates in the 1970s. Initially, food security was framed narrowly around national food supply and caloric availability, with governments seen as central actors in maintaining sufficient stocks, particularly in response to food price crises and famines (Norhasmah, et al., 2010). Food was treated largely as a commodity and the focus was on quantity over quality.

By the 1990s, a more comprehensive understanding began to take shape. The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as existing "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). This definition is based on a framework consisting of four pillars: availability, access, utilization and stability (FAO, 2008). It recognized that hunger can persist even where food is abundant, due to poverty, inequality or weak infrastructure. The utilization pillar emphasizes nutrition and food safety, while stability refers to the reliability of food access over time, even in the face of shocks (Guiné, et al., 2021).

The 2014 State of Food Insecurity in the World report deepened the link between food security and nutrition, highlighting malnutrition in all forms – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and the emerging global challenge of obesity. This broader framing acknowledged the importance of food quality and diet-related health outcomes (FAO et al, 2014). FAO's 2014 Strategic Framework further aligned food security with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 2: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". Reflecting this integration, the UN's flagship report on food security was renamed in 2017 as The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (FAO et

al, 2017). This is not always fully operationalized, however; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO), country offices tend to align with the priorities of the Ministries of Agriculture, focusing on food production with market access as a secondary consideration.

Since the 2010s, critics have challenged the four-pillar model for overlooking structural issues in food systems. Scholars like Lang and Barling argued that this framework depoliticized food insecurity by ignoring historical patterns of dispossession, corporate power concentration and trade inequities (Lang and Barling, 2012). They advocated for a redefinition that emphasized justice and sustainability, viewing food insecurity as both a technical and political issue.

A significant response came in 2020 from the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) in its report Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030. Commissioned by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the report added two new pillars – agency and sustainability – to the existing four (HLPE, 2020). Agency refers to individuals' and communities' ability to influence decisions about food systems, reflecting concerns over democratic legitimacy and increasing corporate dominance. Sustainability focuses on the long-term viability of food systems in the face of environmental and social challenges. The revised six-pillar model also emphasizes social acceptability, ensuring people can access food in culturally and socially dignified ways, rather than relying solely on emergency aid or charity. This broader conception reflects a deeper shift in how food security is understood, not just as access to calories or nutrients, but as a matter of power, participation and ecological balance.

Uptake of the six-pillar model is not universal. The 2024 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, for instance, offered a definition of financing for food security that focused solely on the original pillars (FAO et al, 2024). It described such financing as the public and private resources (domestic and foreign) directed at ensuring availability, access, utilization and stability of nutritious food, as well as the systems that support them, including health, education and social protection. Likely barriers to adoption of the six-pillar model include lack of awareness on the part of governments due to frequent personnel changes, or deliberate resistance to limit the "agency" of individuals.

The six-pillar model is gaining traction in academic and policy circles, however, signalling a growing consensus on the need to integrate participatory governance, ecological sustainability, nutrition and social justice into food security frameworks. These emerging perspectives are seen by many as critical for crafting policies that are not only effective in addressing hunger but also fair, inclusive and resilient to future challenges. Notably, the Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centered Climate Action, endorsed by 44 countries at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP30) in November 2025, put a spotlight on the unequal impacts of climate change

and, for the first time, introduced social protection as part of the climate resilience narrative (UNCC, 2025).

Another shift in terminology took place in the early 2020s, when the 2021 United Nations' Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) put the spotlight on transformation of food systems rather than food security as a pathway towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. This indicates high level acceptance of the food systems approach compared with summits of previous decades (the 2008 World Food Security Summit and the 1996 World Food Summit). The UNFSS process, as well as the UNFSS+2 and UNFSS+4 stocktaking moments (UN, 2025), has provoked the development of 130 National Pathways for Food System Transformation (although in practice siloism remains entrenched in many governments). There has been controversy from some quarters, however. Notably the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) of the CFS boycotted the process over concerns of corporate influence.

**DRIVERS OF FOOD INSECURITY**

Since the relaunch of the SOFI report in 2017, which reported a marked rise in global malnutrition after years of decline (FAO et al, 2017), annual editions have reflected an evolving understanding of food security drivers in a shifting global context.

- The 2017 edition emphasized the link between conflict and food insecurity, highlighting the prevalence of undernourishment in regions facing both conflict and climate shocks (FAO et al, 2017). In 2018, the report turned to climate-related threats, warning that climate variability and extremes were eroding gains in food security and impacting food quality, health and maternal and infant nutrition (FAO et al, 2018).

- In 2019, economic drivers took centre stage. The report noted that uneven recovery from the 2008-2009 financial crisis was hampering progress on hunger and malnutrition, calling for structural transformation to address poverty, inequality and marginalization (FAO et al, 2019). The 2020 edition expanded on this by focusing on food affordability, urging action on the cost drivers within supply chains, food environments and the broader political economy (FAO et al, 2020).

- The 2021 report synthesized previous themes – climate, conflict and economic downturns – through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for integrated, multisectoral policies, investments and legal frameworks (FAO et al, 2021). This was followed, in 2022, by a response-focused SOFI that showed how food and agriculture policies could be repurposed to make healthy diets more affordable (FAO et al, 2022).

- In 2023, while reiterating earlier drivers, the report identified urbanization as a mega trend, highlighting cities' vulnerability to shocks, the rise of inequality, and the crucial

role of affordable healthy diets in urban and peri-urban areas where food is primarily purchased (FAO et al, 2023).

- The 2024 edition of SOFI was again response focused, dealing with financing (FAO et al, 2024).

- In 2025, however, SOFI addressed food inflation to achieve zero hunger, identifying the cascading challenges that have driven up food prices since 2020: a surge in demand caused by post-pandemic fiscal relief measures; the impact of geopolitical disruptions on supplies (such as the war in Ukraine and trade route disturbances); and extreme climate events. As noted, it identified concentration of corporate power in the food system as a key reason why food prices remain high despite the costs of inputs (FAO et al, 2025).

Together, these reports trace a deepening recognition of the complex, interconnected forces shaping global food security and nutrition, as well as shifting global conditions.

What they do not explicitly reflect, however, is the global power dimension of food insecurity, which is the legacy of historical policies and responses to successive food crises. Clapp and Moseley (2020) identify three distinct food policy eras that have had long lasting, detrimental impacts on global food security and food sovereignty in the Global South and on environmental management: the push for self-sufficiency and the first Green revolution of the 1950s to 1970s, including countries of the Global North making adoption of agricultural technologies a condition of food aid to developing countries; the neoliberal era of the 1980s to 2000s, during which structural adjustment loans to poor countries sought to stimulate trade; and the neo- productivism and new Green Revolution since 2007, in which the private sector has pushed productivism, the agrifood sector has become financialized and smallholders have been incorporated into specialized global supply chains – while land rights have diminished.

The cumulative effect of these policy approaches contributed to the food system vulnerabilities that were laid bare during COVID-19 and contribute to food insecurity as a result of successive and future crises (Clapp and Moseley, 2020).

## 1.3 How we went about this research

This project has been conducted by an international team of researchers. The project has been led by RUAF CIC, in partnership with the ClimateWorks Foundation, a global philanthropy platform driving climate solutions. Regional partners include Comida do Amanhã, Zero Hunger Institute and Regenera Institute (South America), the African Food Systems Transformation Collective (established by the African Climate Foundation), the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (Indonesia), and independent consultants in India, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The research process has been designed to leverage the expertise and regional knowledge of multiple partner organizations, while maintaining consistency in approach and analysis.

The research was conducted in three phases. Phase one involved a review of academic literature and grey literature across five global regions, with particular focus on certain countries: Africa (Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Zimbabwe); South America (Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia and Chile); South and South East Asia (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia); Europe (the European Union and the United Kingdom); North America (the United States and Canada). The literature review involved online searches of national and local government websites, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, development agencies, research institutes and media outlets, as well as international organizations that operate in the regions. The literature review enabled the team to identify which narratives are present in different parts of the world, with which stakeholders adhere to them.

Phase two involved expert interviews and stakeholder consultations, with a total of 43 interviews conducted across the five regions and among experts operating at the international level. The interviews allowed the team to confirm the narratives detected in the literature review and to explore: how different actors are using the narratives to shape approaches to addressing food security and climate action; what factors influence whether or not narratives are taken up by policy and decision-makers; the opportunities and strategies for engaging with, and influencing, food security narratives to create greater alignment between political food security and climate agendas; and the capacities needed to leverage the opportunities and deploy the strategies.

Phase three involved strategic engagement through an online workshop that enabled the team to check the draft findings with selected food security experts.

# 2 Key Findings

## 2.1 A porous typology of food security narratives

Food security narratives are inherently complex and difficult to pin down. They resist neat classification, often shifting in form and meaning depending on who is using them. Different sectors and organizations may draw from multiple narratives at once, emphasizing certain elements that align with their goals while downplaying or ignoring those that do not. Frequently, they use similar language to describe very different ideas, masking the underlying interests. This co-option of terminology can create confusion and risks diluting key terms to the point where they lose all meaning (see under Interpretive use below).

This complexity made this project both challenging and deeply engaging. The task has been to untangle the cross-influences, uncover the values and interests that lie beneath them, and understand how they are used and to what effect – especially in relation to climate action.

Despite the challenges, within this project some classification has been necessary to enable cross-country and regional analysis – even if the narrative types are porous, with many overlaps, interactions and shifting boundaries between them. Food security narratives are, by their very nature, in a constant state of flux.

The typology we present here is intended as an analytical tool rather than a definitive framework. We intend for it to spark debate and discussion among philanthropic foundations around how food security narratives can be harnessed and amplified – or effectively countered – to build support for climate action.

Given the nuanced and dynamic nature of food security narratives, the typology is relatively simple. Figure 1 sets out 14 narrative types. Under each heading is a statement explaining the main tenets of the narratives, in most cases followed by supplementary statements or statements indicating variants of the same type. Figure 2 shows how some narratives are closely linked and others less so, while figure 3 shows the relative prominence and status of the narrative globally-driven and grassroots or bottom-up narratives – whether they are stable, emerging, rising or declining.

The typology was developed through review of the literature in each country and region. In some instances, we have adjusted narrative labels for the sake of consistency, where different sources referred to similar narratives by different names. Annex 1 contains a detailed analysis of how each type is expressed in different contexts.

# Figure 1: A typology of food security narratives

## Protectionist

**Key arguments**

- International trade as a threat to national food security.
- Need for protectionist policies that penalize imports and promote domestic production.

**Typically used by:**
National governments

## Deregulation

**Key arguments**

- Food insecurity is a result of market inefficiency.
- Liberalizing trade and reducing regulations will boost farmer incomes and reduce poverty.

**Typically used by:**
National governments, private sector

## Right to food

**Key arguments**

- Access to adequate food is a fundamental and legal human right.
- Governments have a binding obligation to ensure their people are fed.

**Typically used by:**
UN, FAO, some national governments, NGOs, think tanks, anti-poverty advocacy groups

## Productivist

**Key arguments**

- Food security through increased production,often through technological innovation and high-yield staples.
- Feeding a growing population while driving economic growth.

**Typically used by:**
Governments, private sector (agri-tech), research institutes, large farm lobby

## Global North responsiblity

**Key arguments**

- Wealthy Global North countries have a duty to ensure global food security.
- Global food security is vital to humanitarian goals and national security.

**Typically used by:**
National governments (but declining), aid agencies, NGOs

## Civil food resilience

**Key arguments**

- 'Whole of society' approach needed where citizens are prepared to act collectively to ensure everyone remains fed during and after crises.

**Typically used by:**
Academics, local governments, local food partnerships/food policy councils

## Food systems transformation

**Key arguments**

- Food security can't be achieved through 'business as usual'
- Requires fundamental, integrated overhaul of entire food system to one that is healthy, equitable, and sustainable for all

**Typically used by:**
UN agencies, academics, national governments, local governments, NGOs, private sector

## Nutrition and health

**Key arguments**

- Food security requires people to have access not only to sufficient calories but to affordable, safe and diverse diets that are essential for good health.
- Climate change and conflict can impair access to nutritious foods.

**Typically used by:**
UN agencies, funders, research institutes, private sector (agritech), NGOs

## Food trade

**Key arguments**

- Open markets and international trade are essential for ensuring stable and sufficient food supply across regions.
- Trade ensures sufficient food supply amid climate, conflict and economic shocks.

**Typically used by:**
WTO, WEF, national governments, private sector

## Localization & sub-national

**Key arguments**

- Local and regional actors are better positioned to understand and address specific drivers of food insecurity within communities.

**Typically used by:**
Local governments, NGOs / CSOs, academics, local private sector

## Food sovereignty

**Key arguments**

- Genuine food security requires that those who produce, distribute, and consume food have democratic control over their own food systems.
- Food sovereignty is a prerequisite for food security.

**Typically used by:**
Grassroots social movements, farmers and workers orgs, CSOs, some farmers, academia, governments

## Agroecology

**Key arguments**

- Food security is possible through farming systems that work in harmony with ecological principles.
- Focus on long-term sustainability.
- Food security is durable only if ecosystems can recover from shocks.

**Typically used by:**
Grassroots social movements, smallholder groups, environmental NGOs, academics, Indigenous groups, local governments

## Planetary health

**Key arguments**

- Long-term food security is only possible if we adopt diets that are healthy for people and ecologically sustainable within planetary boundaries.

**Typically used by:**
Academics, NGOs, local governments, national governments

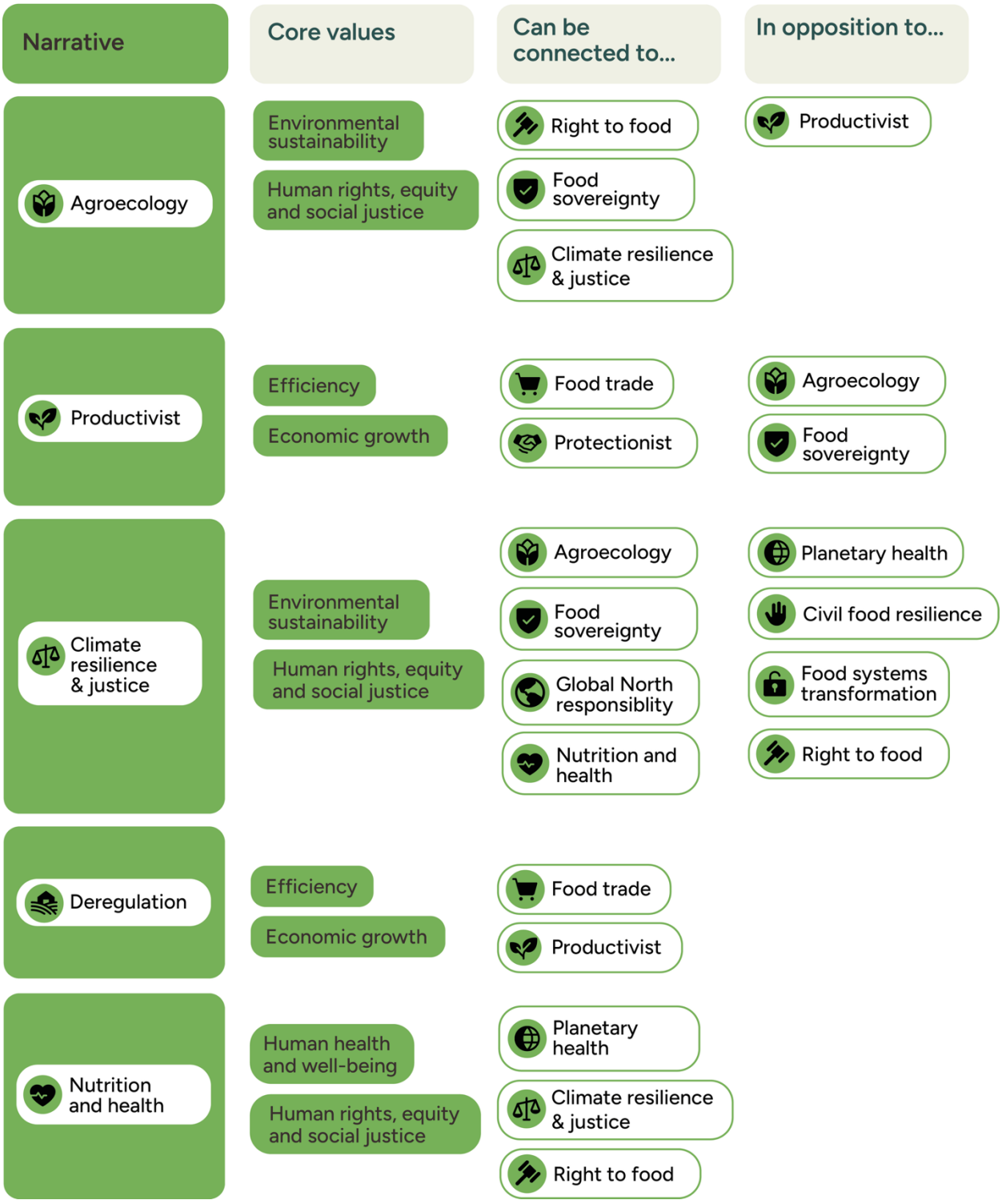
## Climate resilience & justice

**Key arguments**

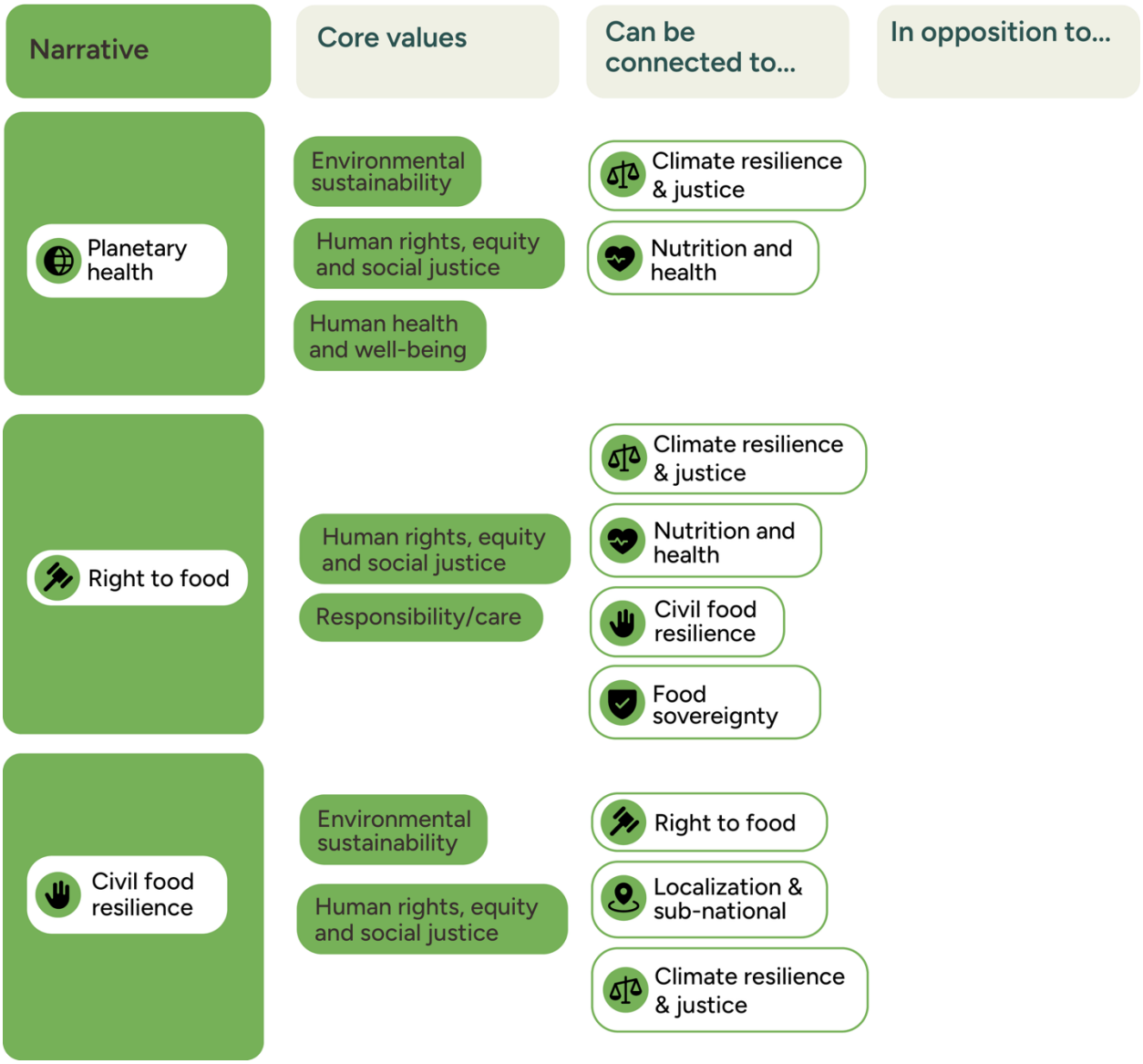
- We must build resilience to climate events and other stresses through the food system, which can have a dramatic effect on food security, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Maintaining food security requires minimizing disruption to domestic and imported food supplies.

**Typically used by:**
Governments (especially regarding supply chains), resilience/planning departments, international NGOs / CSOs, Indigenous groups

# Figure 2: Core values, connections and oppositions between narratives



| Narrative | Core values | Can be connected to... | In opposition to... |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Food systems transformation | Integration<br>Human rights, equity and social justice<br>Environmental sustainability | Climate resilience & justice<br>Localization & sub-national | Productivist |
| Food sovereignty | Human rights, equity and social justice<br>Environmental sustainability | Climate resilience & justice<br>Right to food<br>Agroecology | Deregulation<br>Productivist |
| Food trade | Efficiency<br>Economic growth | Productivist<br>Global North responsiblity | Protectionist |
| Global North responsiblity | Stability<br>Responsibility/care<br>Social justice | Climate resilience & justice<br>Right to food | Food sovereignty |
| Protectionist | National sovereignty & pride<br>Responsibility/care | Productivist | Food trade |
| Localization & sub-national | Integration<br>Decentralization | Civil food resilience<br>Food systems transformation | |


Narrative
Core values
Can be connected to...
In opposition to...
Planetary health
Environmental sustainability
Human rights, equity and social justice
Human health and well-being
Climate resilience & justice
Nutrition and health
Right to food
Human rights, equity and social justice
Responsibility/care
Climate resilience & justice
Nutrition and health
Civil food resilience
Food sovereignty
Civil food resilience
Environmental sustainability
Human rights, equity and social justice
Right to food
Localization & sub-national
Climate resilience & justice

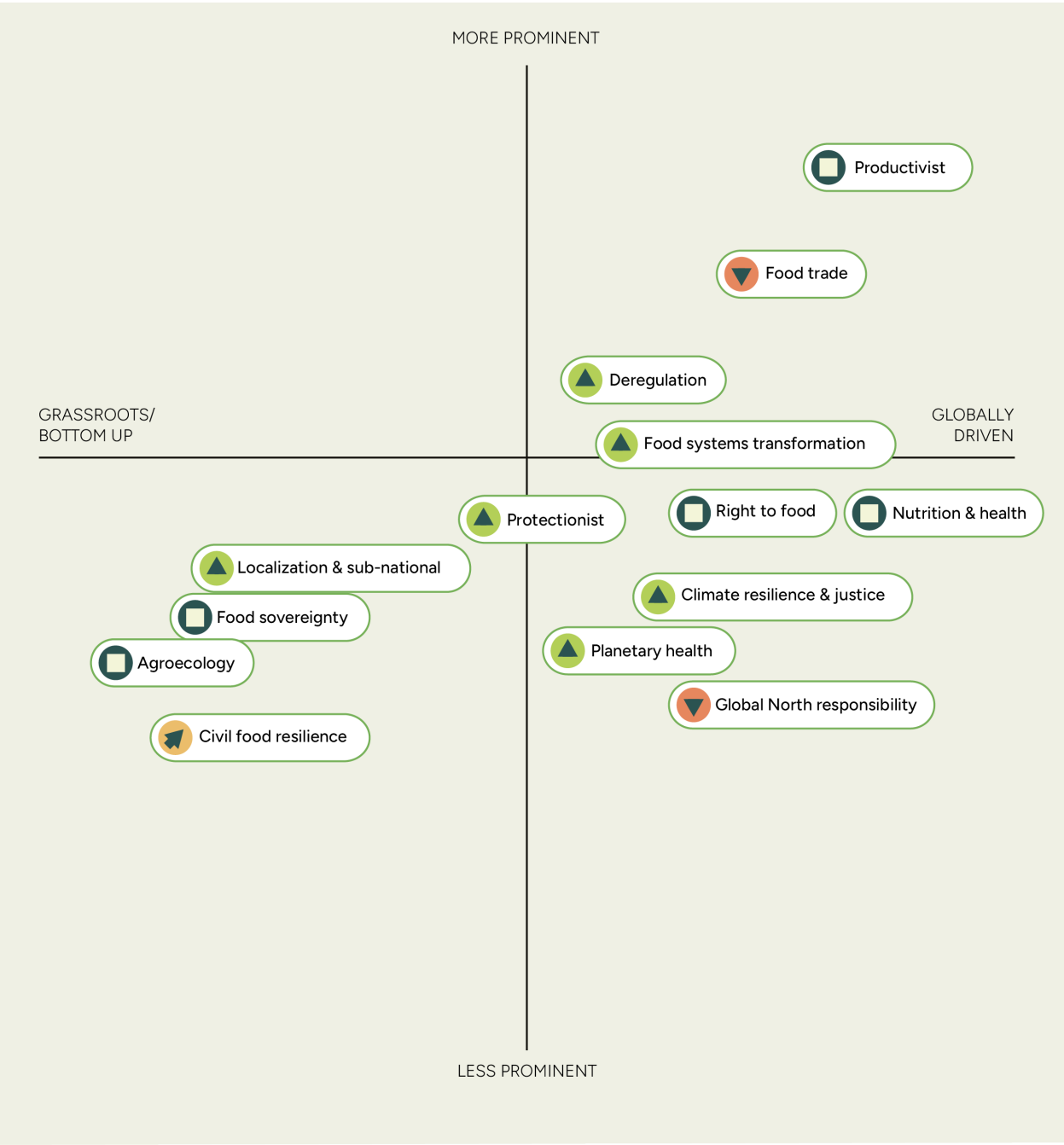
# Figure 3: Relative prominence and status of globally driven and grassroots or bottom up narratives

Rising: Gaining prominence in the current global context

Emerging: Introduced in the last five years and starting to impact global discourse

Declining: Losing prominence in the current global context

Stable: Well-established and retaining a level of prominence over time.



## 2.2 Observations of global trends in food security narratives

For climate philanthropy, understanding which narratives dominate globally, and why, is essential. The observations below identify which narratives perpetuate emissions-intensive systems, which alternative narratives have traction but lack resources, and where power dynamics create dependencies that undermine both food security and climate goals.

These findings show that productivist narratives reinforce corporate concentration and lock in high-emissions pathways, making them incompatible with meaningful climate action. While this research did not set out to prescribe which narratives philanthropy should harness, the findings reveal patterns about which narratives currently reinforce the status quo and which challenge it. They lead towards the conclusion that philanthropic resources can have the greatest climate impact when they strategically elevate and resource alternatives to the productivist narrative, including those that are locally embedded and embody lived experiences.

This section summarizes the main observations on dominant food security narratives around the world, with particular consideration for how climate change is represented and the types of solutions envisaged. It notes key global power dynamics that influence narratives between the Global North and Global South and examines narrative trends by different sectors. Lastly, it considers the timescales for narrative change. It ends with a set of strategic insights for philanthropy.

**TAKEAWAYS:**

- The dominant global narrative is productivist, promoted through a nexus of international organizations, national governments and transnational corporations. Productivism perpetuates concentration of corporate power in the food system.

- Productivism prioritizes the availability and stability pillars of food security, with less regard for access, utilization, agency and sustainability. In focusing on quantity, the productivist narrative does not consider what is produced or how, or whether it is meeting the needs of the community.

- While modern productivism uses climate-related narratives (especially climate adaptation), the underlying values are opaque; it adopts similar language to other, opposing narratives but without acknowledging trade-offs.

- Other co-existing narratives, including different takes on climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience and food sovereignty, have greater or lesser degrees of traction in different regions.

- Global narratives are highly influenced by power dynamics and the legacy of the Green Revolution that keeps some states in a situation of dependency.

- Civil society, grassroots and farmers movements have considerable potential to combat unhelpful narratives and hold governments to account.

- Narratives at the local level tend to be more rooted in lived experience, culture and the immediacy of climate change. Higher level narratives – such as at the level of international organizations – are more abstract and require interpretation and implementation.

- Not all farmers are the same and not all businesses are the same. It is important not to make uninformed assumptions about their narratives.

- Narrative change can take a long time and require sustained, long-term advocacy efforts – yet major political shifts can lead to sudden, seismic narrative changes, for better or worse.

### 2.2.1 Regional similarities, differences and power dynamics

- **In all parts of the world, productivism remains the dominant global narrative,** coexisting alongside other, more nuanced narratives. Productivist narratives are used to justify policies and practices that perpetuate the concentration of corporate power in the food system. Moreover, with a focus on quantity productivism prioritizes the availability and stability pillars of food security; far less attention is paid to economic or physical access, utilization (nutrition), sustainability and agency pillars. As such, the productivist narrative does not consider either what is produced or how, or whether it is meeting the needs of the community.

- **The modern productivist narrative frames climate concern as "we have to produce more food for a growing population with less resources / while meeting the 1.5° target" and the imperative of adapting production methods to be resilient to anticipated climate risks.** Climate mitigation is barely addressed by the productivist narrative, and then only when carbon reduction or use of renewables also increase efficiency. Productivism is also connected to trade narratives, especially in the Global North where some country level narratives (e.g. Canada, UK) hinge on maximizing production for trade. For climate philanthropy, this reveals a critical tension: some climate-focused funding can inadvertently reinforce this narrative by supporting efficiency and yield gains rather than systemic transformation with community needs and wishes at the centre. This represents a major missed opportunity for climate action.

- **Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) and agritech solutions are part of a global productivist-innovation narrative** that is now embedded in international processes (including recommendations of the IPCC and the UNFSS) and has thus been promoted to, and adopted by, many national governments. **CSA is an umbrella term** that was coined by the FAO as a way to sustainably increase productivity and resilience while reducing greenhouse gases. It includes some traditionally informed practices alongside agritech solutions developed by global corporations and promoted to small scale farmers, including those aimed at sustainable intensification. The stated values of agritech approaches are often similar to the values of organizations that adhere to opposing narratives, such as food sovereignty and agroecology. Both claim values of ecology, resilience, sustainability and equity, leading to accusations of corporate greenwashing. Agritech solutions may have blind spots over people who are most vulnerable to climate change, either failing to be accessible to them or having unintended consequences for them. This means it can be **very hard to identify the underlying values and beneficiaries of each strategy.**

Philanthropic funders should look beyond climate rhetoric to assess whether solutions address emissions at a systems level or merely optimize existing high-emissions approaches that consolidate corporate power.

- **Resilience narratives in the Global North tend to focus on maintaining infrastructure and functioning supply chains** and have been prompted by non-climate events that have driven awareness of vulnerabilities in the food system – such as Brexit in the United Kingdom and COVID-19 in all countries. In Africa, climate narratives are framed around loss and damage following major climate events that have affected the food system, with the aim of rebuilding to prevent repeated impacts in the future. **Climate justice, meanwhile, is used predominantly by international organizations** in respect of low-income countries that suffer the worst impacts of climate change but have the least responsibility for their causes. In Africa and Latin America, the notion of climate justice is closely connected to food sovereignty, whereas in the United States and Canada there is particular focus on disproportionate impacts by race and for Indigenous people.

- National positions on food security coexist alongside **local food security narratives that are informed by lived experience (including experiences of climate impacts), culture and demographics.** This includes food sovereignty (with varying degrees of prominence, see below), the trend towards developing local level food strategies and action plans, and the emerging civil food resilience narrative that puts the emphasis on coordinated community-level capacity to ensure food security in case of major shocks and stresses (whether climate-related, geopolitical or another driver). The absence of local voices in national policymaking can create narrative tensions between levels, especially where national governments pursue a productivist agenda that is heavily influenced by agritech interests.

- **Food sovereignty, while a global movement, is a more powerful narrative in the Global South than the Global North.** It is explicitly written into food legislation in some Latin American and Asian countries. In **Latin America it is seen as an anti-Global North narrative**, based on the perception of the Global North as heavily influenced by extractive corporate interests. Similarly, African civil society organizations view food sovereignty as vastly preferable to the food basket-based food security of international aid agencies since it would allow local communities to address the root causes of food insecurity, address environmental degradation and build resilience to climate shocks and stresses. In the Global North, the food sovereignty and agroecology narratives tend to be (relatively weakly) woven into progressive policy narratives but are vulnerable to being sidelined – as seen in the case of the European Union (EU) Farm to Fork strategy,

which was unveiled in 2020 but subsequently put on hold following widespread farmer protests.

- The **right to food narrative is also more explicitly prevalent in the Global South** than in the North, having been written into the Constitutions of several countries. In the Global North, on the other hand, the right to food has been written into the Constitutions of Spain and Finland only, but in some other countries is implicit in broader human rights commitments or policy frameworks. There is, however, a strong expectation that diverse, nutritious and affordable food will be available in the United Kingdom due to decades of reliance on market-led just-in-time distribution arrangements for cheap food. While there have been periodic concerns over supply chain interruptions (such as the disruption to distribution caused by the 2001 fuel price demonstrations), they have been short lived and quickly forgotten. Moreover, and most significantly, the social and environmental externalities have been neither acknowledged nor accounted for. Narratives therefore tend to focus on preventing market failure so that the expectation (or perceived right) will be met, while at the same time relying on charity food provision to households affected by food insecurity.

- Generally speaking, **nutrition and health narratives are prominent among international NGOs and in countries with high levels of hunger, malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies**. In high income countries of the Global North, the dominant form of malnutrition is overweight and obesity. This tends to be considered as a separate anti-obesity agenda and may only be connected with food insecurity by health professionals and social workers.

- The **Planetary Health narrative has gained significant public traction** since its introduction by the EAT-Lancet report, Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems (Willet et al, 2019), especially in the Global North, with renewed attention in late 2025 on the publication of the update analysis (Rockström et al, 2025). This narrative bridges health and climate concerns. Its success is due partly to the legitimacy of its academic authors and partly to the high profile public relations campaign that accompanied the launch of each edition – even though it has since emerged that the meat lobby funded a covert counter PR campaign designed to discredit the narrative, out of fear that it would impact industry (Carlile, 2025). Dietary change to reduce meat consumption is just one of the EAT-Lancet pathways to change, and there is a clear message on the importance of cultural contexts and culturally appropriate and sustainable dietary traditions. Nonetheless, some have dismissed the diet as largely irrelevant in countries whereas typical diets are already largely plant based, such as India. Some consider it dangerous to advocate reduced intake of a protein source in contexts where malnutrition is rife.

### 2.2.2 Inter-regional power dynamics and dependencies

- There are significant inter-regional power dynamics that shape food security narratives and actions – in particular, the **power dynamic between countries in the Global South that carry large debt burdens and the Global North**. Debt repayments leave countries unable to fund programmes to strengthen agriculture or build resilience, leaving them unable to produce enough for their populations and dependent on imports. In the Caribbean, food imports consist largely of ultra processed foods manufactured by global corporations; the food import bill is exceptionally high. In many African countries, repayment conditions cause export-oriented agriculture to be prioritized, leaving them dependent on short-term humanitarian food aid in the wake of shocks and stresses. Civil society advocates consider it to be in the interests of global institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank that adhere to a Global North Responsibility narrative ("feeding the world"), to maintain this dependency – not least because it provides an outlet for surplus commodities. For their part, local populations would often prefer cash, because it would enable them to pursue food sovereignty, address environmental degradation and build resilience.

- At the same time, there is an expectation on the part of climate vulnerable states, such as Bangladesh, that the Global North will show leadership over climate adaptation of the food system and deliver on climate funding pledges. This expectation may be in jeopardy in light of the US-led narrative shift away from global responsibility and denial of climate change narratives. The re-withdrawal of the US from the Paris Climate Agreement is targeted at stopping climate finance contributions, leaving other countries and the private sector to bridge the gap.

### 2.2.3 Sectoral roles in shaping narratives

- **Global agritech companies have consolidated significant power and drive the productivist narrative** through lobbying, market control and influencing institutions such as WTO and World Bank. On the one hand, corporate strategies deliberately export Global North models to the Global South (e.g. Brazil's commodity-focused success is emulated in Africa). On the other hand, policy makers in the Global South actively seek these solutions due to food security pressures, historical path dependency (e.g. post-Green Revolution mindset in India) and perception of proven success. Fertilizer subsidies and public distribution systems can serve as lock-ins, creating dependency and making transitions to other narratives (such as agroecology) risky for policy makers. Moreover, governments tend to prioritize immediate food supply and price stability offered by "quick fix" tech solutions to avoid public backlash.

- The food security narratives presented by **NGOs tend to focus on structural and long-term solutions, such as addressing the upstream causes of poverty**, as well as providing emergency support for those facing immediate food insecurity. Some **industry solutions, on the other hand, tend to focus on the symptoms of food insecurity** – such as fortification as a remedy for severe malnutrition, which is certainly helpful to sufferers but does not prevent the incidence of food insecurity and malnutrition in the long term. Similarly, some agritech solutions under the productivist narrative have been critiqued for providing short term soil fixes without proper consideration of long-term effects.

- **Civil society organizations, grassroots movements and farmers' unions have incredible power in combatting or withstanding imposition of unfavourable narratives and holding governments to account,** as seen in numerous cases where campaigns and demonstrations have led to policy change or the withdrawal of proposals. These include the powerful farmers' demonstrations in India in 2021, which led to the withdrawal of the Farm Laws. These constituencies are grounded in place and speak inherently from lived experience, cultural appropriateness and knowledge of crops that thrive in the local environment.

- It must be acknowledged, however, that **not all farmers are the same. Consequently, not all farmers adhere to the same narratives** and their power as a constituency varies between regions, and between countries and sub-national areas in the same region. For instance, large land-holding farmers who are politically well-connected and embedded in commodity chains tend to reinforce productivist narratives and promote agritech solutions. While they may be alert to the long-term consequences of issues such as soil degradation, they are less tuned into the immediacy than small farmers. Organized smallholders, on the other hand, tend to be more aware of the immediacy of climate change (as well as health, economic and cultural aspects of smallholder farming) and consequently may be more attuned to the potential threats to their livelihoods. In the Caribbean, meanwhile, farmers have no voice against government and NGO-controlled narratives that focus on production and trade.

- Likewise, **not all businesses or business narratives are the same.** For instance, some consumer goods companies, while being profit-driven, push for support to farmers to produce agricultural products in environmentally sustainable ways, although those that market ultra-processed foods are less attuned to health and nutrition narratives. Agritech companies, on the other hand, claim that farmers are not producing enough because they do not use chemical aids or are using them the wrong way, or because they are not using the latest innovations.

### 2.2.4 Timescales for narrative shift

- **New, nuanced and evolved food security narratives are added frequently, driven largely by civil society, NGOs and researchers** rather than the nexus between government (which is bound to typically four or five-year election cycles that discourage long-term thinking) and the private sector (which profits from the status quo). As such, they tend to remain in a marginal position.

- **It can take quite some time for marginal narratives to make an impression on the mainstream,** through years of sustained effort and gathering momentum. For example, food sovereignty emerged in 1996 but only started to be embedded in international discourse and national (especially Latin American) food systems frameworks from the 2010s. Similarly, the concept of food systems has gathered pace since the 1970s. In both cases, United Nations (UN) endorsement was a significant marker of becoming a major narrative.

- **On the other hand, major political swings to the right can cause seismic shifts in dominant narratives,** upending received wisdom and reconfiguring the food system in a short space of time. This is seen in both the United States under the first Trump Administration (2016-2020) and during the Bolsonaro years in Brazil (2019-2023), where the government narrative shifted towards market-leadership and withdrawal of state intervention. In both cases, the previous narratives were restored by their successors. The second Trump Administration, emboldened by the 2024 electoral victory, has gone even further in shredding the infrastructure that supports food security – both domestically through the decimation of USDA, and internationally through the dismantling of USAID and in initiating a trade war through the introduction of tariffs. The severity, scale and rapidity of these moves mean the reconfiguration is likely to be permanent, with subsequent administrations needing to work with the system they will have inherited.

### 2.2.5 Strategic insights for philanthropy

These observations point to a clear direction for climate philanthropy. The most effective intervention is not to directly oppose productivist narratives (which have overwhelming institutional backing) but to strategically elevate and resource alternatives. This includes food sovereignty in Latin America and parts of Africa where it has constitutional or policy traction, agroecology where it has demonstrated community adoption, civil food resilience in the Global North and rights-based approaches where constitutional or legal frameworks exist. A common characteristic of these alternatives is that they are locally embedded, based on lived experience and emphasize the agency pillar of food security. Thus, local voices must be

amplified, and organizations that promote locally embedded narratives that are ignored by governments must be backed, thereby boosting local resilience, capacity and livelihoods.

Simultaneously, philanthropy should work to expose the gap between productivist climate rhetoric and actual climate outcomes, making visible how corporate-driven "solutions" perpetuate the very systems driving emissions. This approach recognizes that narrative power is unevenly distributed but identifies specific leverage points where philanthropic investment can amplify alternatives that align food security with effective climate action.

## 2.3 How food security narratives are used and what makes them gain traction

Across the interviews, narratives were described as strategic tools used by different actors to shape policy, justify actions and advance specific interests – including international organizations, national governments, the private sector, NGOs, civil society organizations (CSO), academics, research institutes and the media. Their use is a deliberate effort to influence the political and social landscape of food security and climate action. This section explores the ways in which narratives are used by various stakeholders and the factors that determine their success. For philanthropic organizations seeking to align food security and climate agendas, it is critical to understand the landscape of narrative use, including the aims and tactics involved.

We identify three main types of narrative use:

- Strategic, where stakeholders deliberately deploy food security narratives to justify specific policies, promote certain solutions or advance institutional interests.
- Communicative, where stakeholders tailor narratives to resonate with specific audiences through targeted advocacy or media campaigns.
- Interpretive, where stakeholders adapt, reframe and change the meaning of narratives to suit their own interests.

These uses are not static. Narratives are dynamic and are constantly shaped and reinterpreted to suit different contexts and goals.

## 2.3.1 Strategic insights for philanthropy

**TAKEAWAYS:**

- **Scrutinize narrative claims**. Philanthropists should not take statements at face value but check alignment between discourse and implementation and hold narrative users to account for their commitments.
- **Question power dynamics in funding**. Foundations must be alert to the strategic use of narratives, question motives and avoid aid-style funding that perpetuates unhelpful narratives or power imbalances.
- **Amplify local voices.** Back organizations that elevate locally embedded narratives that are ignored by governments, thereby boosting local resilience, capacity and livelihoods.
- **Use convening power.** Philanthropy can bring people from different sectors and departments together, enabling grassroots actors to rally around strong shared messages.
- **Leverage academic and media influence.** Support academics to champion narrative alignment between food security and climate action, while staying critically aware of which media promote which narratives and how that shapes decisions by target readers.

### 2.3.1.1 Strategic use: justifying policies and advancing interests

Strategic use is the deliberate deployment of narratives to justify specific policies, promote certain solutions or advance institutional interests. Philanthropy should not take narrative statements at face value. Instead, it should scrutinize the alignment between the rhetoric and the actual implementation and impact of policies. Funders should also be aware of power dynamics and question motives when deciding which organizations and narratives to support. The following paragraphs are examples of how narratives are used strategically by different stakeholders.

**International organizations shape global agendas**

International organizations, especially UN agencies like FAO, use narratives to set global

agendas. These narratives are disseminated through reports, such as the annual SOFI reports and are embedded in frameworks like the SDGs. National governments then adopt these global discourses to demonstrate legitimacy, enhance their political standing and potentially access resources. For example, Nigeria's government used UN food systems language to signal a commitment to holistic approaches, although it continued to implement contradictory policies in practice. International frameworks are also used by other stakeholders to position their own programmes; for example, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) produced a summary briefing for businesses on the 201 SOFI report, in which it highlighted 'need to know' points for businesses and identified a number of its own initiatives as pathways for businesses to make a difference (WBCSD, 2021).

**The productivist narrative persists in international organizations**

Despite the evolution of food security definitions, a deeply embedded productivist narrative coexists within organizations like FAO. This persistence is linked to the close relationship between FAO country offices and national ministries of agriculture, whose primary role is to support production. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle where productivism takes precedence, even in climate discussions. For example, FAO's Global roadmap on achieving SDG2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold (FAO, 2023a) still emphasizes yield gaps, production and technology, even as it seeks to align food and climate agendas. An interviewee noted that Ministers of Agriculture are concerned with adapting to climate change but not necessarily with mitigating it, and their primary focus remains on producing more food.

**Aid and trade narratives conceal root causes of hunger**

International organizations, western governments and donors (such as the World Bank and IMF) use trade and aid narratives to mask the root causes of hunger. Debt repayment conditions, for example, may force countries to prioritize export-oriented agriculture, leaving them dependent on short-term humanitarian aid. A food sovereignty perspective would address the root causes, environmental degradation and the need for long-term support and infrastructure investment to build resilience. A philanthropic focus on these traditional aid strategies risks perpetuating dependency and power imbalances.

**Governments legitimize actions and seek political gain**

Politicians use food security narratives to justify policies and mobilize voters. In Indonesia, narratives of self-sufficiency are used to support policies like food estate programmes and national production targets, even when critics argue that these policies do not align with local needs. In Africa, governments use food deficit narratives to justify emergency food imports and external inputs, which may undermine local biodiversity and resilience. Furthermore, right-wing politicians in Europe invoke the argument of "no food without farmers" to mobilize rural voters towards promoting a productivist narrative and to discredit climate-focused policies (the same phrase is also used by grassroots movements in Latin America and Africa to argue

for small scale farmers' rights and protections). These narratives often ignore issues of nutrition security and the long-term viability of farming, which is linked to climate adaptation and mitigation.

**The private sector shapes favourable business environments**

The private sector uses narratives to advance its interests. In the Global North, large agricultural firms use narratives of geopolitical stability and "feeding the world" to justify investment in industrial monocultures. Across all regions, companies use productivist narratives emphasizing yield, efficiency and technological progress to promote their products and research and development agendas. These tactics are often used strategically during climate crises to position corporate solutions as essential for agricultural resilience – and therefore food security.

**Civil servants advocate for integrated approaches**

Civil servants can use authoritative narratives for internal advocacy to bridge disciplinary and sectoral divides. For example, Toronto's Food Strategy team used the EAT-Lancet narrative to build connections across disciplines and sectors. The EAT-Lancet Commission's first report (Willett et al, 2019) offered the first full scientific review of a healthy diet within planetary boundaries, uniting scientists around common actions. Leveraging its release, the team invited a senior Commission researcher to launch the report in Toronto to environmental and food organizations, senior city staff, politicians, the public and media. They then presented the findings at a workshop that drew together staff from Public Health, Environment, Planning and Social Development, many meeting cross-divisionally for the first time, to align strategies and forge practical collaboration. Follow-up meetings with Health Canada led to the inclusion of environmental considerations in Canada's Food Guide.

**NGOs and CSOs challenge the status quo**

NGOs and CSOs use alternative narratives, such as agroecology and food sovereignty, to challenge dominant policies and integrate food and climate within the same frameworks. Organizations like the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) use evidence-based campaigns to influence policy, leading countries such as Benin and Togo to develop national agroecology strategies. These actors also use narratives to resist external influences. For example, activists in Togo and Kenya opposed adoption of genetically modified organisms (GMO) by framing it as a threat to local food systems and biodiversity. However, from a different perspective, the use of climate narratives by international NGOs can be seen as foreign interference that threatens national agricultural interests.

**Academics provide evidence to support narratives**
Academics and research institutes lend credibility to narratives by providing evidence and expert opinion. In Sri Lanka, a "food security means water security" slogan was used to support climate-sensitive narratives in engagements with government agencies. However, there is a growing tendency for some researchers to shift from a neutral position to an activist role, lending their legitimacy to advocacy campaigns. Philanthropy should recognize this trend and carefully consider the motives behind the evidence being presented.

**Media amplifies narratives based on its own agenda**
Media outlets act as channels for narratives but also have their own editorial agendas that are shaped by audience and advertiser interests. This determines the exposure and critique given to various narratives. In Brazil, a pro-agribusiness TV commercial on the Globo channel (the largest broadcast company in the country) portrayed the sector as the nation's economic engine ("Agro is pop, agro is tech, agro is everything") (Medeiros et al, 2024), while counter-narratives from the Landless Rural Workers' Movement appeared on left-wing publications and YouTube (MST, 2018). Philanthropy must be aware of which media outlets are promoting specific narratives and the implications for decision-makers and public opinion.

#### 2.3.1.2 Communicative use

Communicative use is where stakeholders tailor narratives to resonate with specific audiences through targeted advocacy or media campaigns. Philanthropic foundations need to consider the communications strategies and capacity of potential partners in shaping food security to promote climate action, identifying target stakeholders and the most effective narratives and channels to reach them. They also need to be aware of, and prepared for, the potential for organizations that are not aligned with, and whose interests are threatened by, the narratives to launch counter communications campaigns. The following paragraphs are examples of communicative narrative use.

**NGOs and allies use narratives to shift public opinion and influence policymakers**
International organizations use narratives in reports and thought-leadership pieces that are widely disseminated across traditional and social media. Organizations' reputations and public relations capacities can result in significant shifts in public opinion and policy. However, their impact can be reduced by counter-campaigns intended to discredit their messages. For example, the first EAT-Lancet report (Willett et al, 2019), which used narratives of planetary health and sustainable diets, gained wide media attention. In response, the animal agriculture alliance hired a public relations firm to discredit the report, its authors and its funders (Carlile, 2025).

**CSOs and advocacy groups adapt language to generate urgency**
Food security narratives are often altered for mass communication using emotionally resonant

language. Phrases like “a child dies every few minutes” are common in campaigns to provoke concern and attract donor support. In the United States, narratives are sometimes re-cast to avoid political backlash and gain bi-partisan support. For instance, while climate narratives may become unacceptable, the issue of child hunger “might be one of the very few, almost apolitical things that you could talk about”, according to an interviewee from the United States. Simplified language is used to make complex issues more relatable, although this can risk misinterpretation. For example, in the United Kingdom the Landworkers’ Alliance has re-cast food sovereignty as “Food in our Hands” because the original term had low public traction (Landworkers Alliance, 2025).

**Narrative communication is adapted for diverse audiences**
Lobby groups use multiple formats, such as policy briefs and websites, to tailor their messaging. The tone, terminology and imagery are carefully adapted for each target audience. For example, Syngenta Canada developed a corporate brand strategy with the tagline “what matters most”, featuring growers’ stories on its website to appeal to potential customers (Quarry, n.d.). In a separate 2020 submission to the Canadian Standing Committee on Finance, the same company used narratives of resilience and competitiveness to argue for regulatory changes (Syngenta, 2020).

**CSOs reframe narratives based on lived experience**
CSOs often reframe narratives to reflect local cultures and values, which gives them more resonance than abstract global targets. For example, in India, farmers respond to messages about income rather than climate or the SDGs. In Canada, advocates frame food as a site of empowerment linked to racial justice struggles. In Togo, the disruption of traditional food practices due to climate change is framed as a loss of cultural heritage and an erosion of food sovereignty.

**Communications shift for political convenience**
In the current geopolitical climate, especially at the behest of the US Trump Administration, certain words like “climate” have become contentious in international agreements. This has led to tactics known as “green-hushing” in the private sector. For example, an interviewee shared that grocery chain Walmart recast its sustainability actions as food security-focused to avoid political backlash, without making any changes to its activities.

#### 2.3.1.2 Interpretive use

Interpretive use of narratives is where stakeholders adapt, reframe and change the meaning of narratives to suit their own interests. Philanthropic foundations need to critically review the conceptual definitions, values and proposed solutions of organizations they are considering backing to connect food security with climate action. They need to fully understand prospective partners’ interpretive use of narratives and be satisfied that they align with their

own core values. Philanthropists and their partners can also use narratives in interpretive ways to increase the likelihood of take up. For instance, they may align language with that of the target institution so that it appears to fit, or use the current political priority as a primary entry point – then highlight the climate aspects as secondary benefits once it has been accepted.

**Co-option and narrative drift can serve users' interests**

A number of terms are used by multiple stakeholder groups to represent opposing concepts. This creates "narrative drift", when original, transformative intentions are co-opted by more dominant paradigms, such as the private sector creating a favourable business environment. For instance, CSA was defined by the FAO as a way to sustainably increase productivity and resilience while reducing greenhouse gases. However, profit-driven agritech firms like Syngenta and Monsanto also use the term while promoting synthetic agrochemicals and industrial monocropping. This conflicts with the vision of social movements and academics, who criticize the corporate use of CSA as a form of greenwashing.

Another contentious term is "resilience", which can refer to either social networks or physical infrastructure. A USDA official reportedly used the term to justify both conservation practices and crop insurance expansion, which created confusion and reduced pressure for more transformative change. Similarly, "regenerative farming" refers to improving soil health and biodiversity. However, the practices it covers range from agroecology to agritech solutions proposed by private firms, which can be unaffordable for smallholder farmers and lead to debt.

In Italy, President Giorgia Meloni renamed the former Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Resources as the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests (MASAF). The use of "food sovereignty" in this context is (at best) interpretive (and has been fiercely criticised by some as a misappropriation) as it redefines the term to have nationalistic, protectionist connotations – rather than the original focus on social justice and self-determination.

**Interpretive flexibility can create access to policy spaces**

Actors may deliberately craft flexible narratives that align with institutional norms to gain entry into policymaking spaces. Once there, they might begin to advocate for more transformative agendas.

This tactic is commonly used at the city level. For instance, in Toronto, Canada, the Toronto Food Policy Council was originally formed as a sub-committee of the Toronto Department of Public Health in 1991, at a moment of concern over nutrition and food access, and openness to new approaches. Advocates subsequently influenced multiple city strategies and the city adopted an integrated food strategy in 2011.

## 2.3.2 Factors affecting success or failure of food security narratives

**TAKEAWAYS:**

- Philanthropic efforts should consider how to empower grassroots actors and marginalized groups, whose narratives are often undervalued at the national level despite being accurate and impactful.
- Gaining business support for a narrative can be instrumental in getting policymakers on board, as it provides assurance that an approach is unlikely to harm economic interests.
- Developing strong relationships with champions in government, academia and civil society is crucial, as is understanding the political timing for when to introduce new narratives, such as during policy reviews or crises.
- Evidence is not universally valued, especially in politicized contexts, so narratives should combine quantifiable data with relatable, emotive stories to be persuasive to both civil servants and policymakers.
- Narratives are more likely to succeed when they align with existing political priorities, such as national security or economic growth, and when they address real problems that resonate with the public and key constituencies like farmers.

We have identified eight common factors that determine a narrative's ability to influence policy at international, national and local levels. These factors were identified in multiple contexts across the Global South and Global North, with some variations based on politically expedient entry points. Six factors relate to how narratives are delivered (by whom, how and when) while two relate to how well the narratives resonate with the context.

1. **The messenger matters: the influence of organizations and individuals**
   The organization or individual delivering a food security narrative can determine its traction with the target audience. This is based on political weight, perceived credibility and the value attributed to their knowledge. In national policy arenas, narratives from institutions like the World Bank and the African Union carry significant political weight and are likely to be adopted. UN agencies and the private sector also hold influence, as their narratives are often assumed to align with a country's economic interests.

In contrast, the narratives of grassroots actors and marginalized groups are often undervalued at the national level. This is due to power imbalances and a tendency to devalue knowledge based on lived experience. For example, in Bangladesh, agroecological and Indigenous practices are often overlooked in policy because they are deemed less efficient than monoculture models promoted by international donors and agribusiness interests. In Sri Lanka, "top-down approaches marginalize public perspectives, limiting traction for grassroots-driven narratives". However, at the local level, narratives focused on cultural identity and traditional practices gain more support. At the global level, too, human stories can be impactful. As one interviewee put it: "[Lived experiences] help build solidarity because people realize that, globally, we are not alone. We are all facing the same issues, and if we came together and had a collective narrative that could be more powerful."

2. **Business support and investment lend credibility**
   Business backing for a food security narrative can be crucial for getting policymakers onboard, as it provides assurance that an approach will not harm economic interests. A civil society interviewee noted, "if people, governments, philanthropists, businesses are investing in something, then that makes it stick". Support from some businesses can also help fragment opposition from others. Another interviewee said: "By getting some business support you can split the industry. You want to make sure that, if there is any opposition, then it's not coordinated." An example is the UK's soft drinks industry levy, for which campaigners secured support from the restaurant sector by highlighting projected revenues, thereby weakening the inevitable opposition from the soft drinks industry.

3. **Strong relationships, champions and allies open doors**
   Fostering relationships with supportive champions within government can significantly improve the reception of certain narratives. Trust, built through familiarity and support from reputable networks, is essential. Identifying the right government champions can take time, especially when responsibility for food security is not clearly defined. Non-governmental champions, such as celebrities or influential figures like the late Sir David Nabarro, can also be effective. An academic interviewee described Nabarro as "an incredible individual who is inclusive in getting everyone's voices heard". A civil society interviewee said, "you need someone who can tell the story in a way that makes people care and act".

4. **A strategic approach avoids resistance**
   The strategic approach adopted by a narrative's proponent can determine its success or failure. For instance, coming to the table with intractable views and being unwilling to negotiate can lead to the rejection of a policy. An official in Kenya reported that the draft organic policy was rejected because proponents insisted on a policy rather than a strategy and were unwilling to listen to the government's view. Similarly, lack of awareness of how the policy process works is a major obstacle.

5. **Combining evidence with stories is powerful**
   Policymakers are more likely to adopt narratives backed by clear, quantifiable data. An academic interviewee noted, "very digestible data can be very powerful if you put it in the hands of policymakers… a lot of times they don't get that data". However, in politicized contexts, evidence is not always sufficient. An interview from a private sector association noted that "the evidence base is useful for the specifics of the solution, but the actual narrative piece is much more emotion driven". Emotive and value-based narratives can sometimes outweigh data, such as corporate storytelling that portrays farmers as heroes.

6. **Timing is key for cross-sectoral alignment**
   The success of a narrative can depend on the opening of "policy windows", such as during the development of national plans. At these moments, narratives that offer cross-sectoral solutions-linking food to health, the environment and education can gain traction. An academic interviewee explained, "the issue has to be something that a government sees in that moment". Crises, such as droughts, also create opportunities. In Kenya, proponents of GMOs leveraged drought to advance a productivist narrative, positioning drought-resistant maize as a solution to food insecurity. A coalition of 19 opposing organizations used agroecology and food sovereignty narratives to challenge the lifting of the ban, pointing to dependency on multinational agribusiness, compromising of farmers' ability to control their food systems and the threat to biodiversity. In March 2025, the Kenya Court of Appeal blocked the Kenyan government from importing GMOs in the public interest, pending legal and policy questions being fully addressed (The Weekly Vision, 2025).

7. **Alignment with political priorities is crucial**
   Narratives gain greater traction when they align with broader political agendas, like economic growth or national security. Those that frame food systems as opportunities for market innovation or job creation are often taken more seriously. Conversely, narratives that emphasize redistribution or systemic transformation often meet resistance. For example, in the UK, the civil food resilience narrative resonates with the current Labour government's focus on national security and war readiness and was included in the 2025 Food Strategy for England (DEFRA, 2025).

8. **Relevance and public support drive political will**
   Narratives are more likely to be adopted by politicians if they address real-world problems and resonate with voters. According to a civil society interviewee: "If the political class is convinced that is what is needed, and this is where people are interested, they will do it. Because they would risk losing votes if there is no political resonance." In India, farmers are a powerful voting constituency. Farmers' protests against the 2020 Farm Bills, which would have removed price controls, led to their repeal.

## 2.4 Opportunities and strategies

**TAKEAWAYS**

- Global and regional summits offer platforms to link food security with climate commitments and promote alternative narratives.
- Ongoing governance bodies and policy processes provide sustained opportunities for influencing food security and climate agendas.
- Political shifts and external crises create windows for new narratives to gain traction.
- Strategies for influencing narratives include unified communications, evidence-based advocacy and building strong alliances among diverse actors.
- Strategic engagement with farmers and private sector groups can influence their approaches to sustainable food production.

### 2.4.1 Opportunities

We have identified six types of opportunities for shaping food security narratives to promote climate action:

1. Global and regional/continental summits and events offer advocacy moments.
2. Ongoing global governance spaces and processes allow for continuous influence.
3. National strategies and plans, including consultations and multistakeholder platforms, offer opportunities for recurring influence.
4. Political moments, including electoral cycles and anniversaries, create windows for new narratives.
5. External events and crises that prompt public dialogue shifts.
6. Working with sectors on an on-going basis allows for gradual influence

For each of these, we discuss the nature of the opportunity and point to strategies for approaching them (strategies are further explained in section 2.4.2).

#### 2.4.1.1 Global and regional/continental summits and events offer advocacy moments

International summits at the global and regional/continental levels represent a major opportunity for inserting food security considerations into climate commitments, and for

introducing narratives that tie food systems to emissions, biodiversity and justice – thereby moving beyond adaptation to mitigate the climate impacts of agriculture.

In 2025, the biggest global advocacy opportunity was the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP30) in Belém, Brazil. A high point of COP30 was the endorsement of the Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centered Climate Action by 44 countries (UNCC, 2025). Civil society organizations anticipated COP30 as a moment for coalition building, policy influence and for bringing Latin American food and climate narratives to global attention. However, the event was attended by more than 300 industrial agriculture lobbyists – significantly more than in previous years – resulting in a need to navigate high profile interpretative use of climate and food security narratives that support profit-driven interests.

While some view COP (and other events) as largely performative and note that not everyone who wishes to have a say is able to travel, there can be **preparatory processes or "counter COPs"** in individual countries. These present a longer window of opportunity to engage national delegates who will take part in negotiations and bring potential to use more creative methods to capture attention.

**Examples of global and regional/continental events**

- Africa Food Systems Forum – annual summit in August / September.
- Africa Climate Summit – bi-annual event first held in September 2023.
- Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – held annually in October.
- Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Global Forum – bi-annual event usually held in October, with regional summits held in intervening years.
- G20 Summit – held annually; previous hosts have used the summit to launch food security initiatives, such as the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (Brazil, 2024) and a taskforce on food security (South Africa, 2025).
- Leaders' Meeting of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty – first meeting held in November 2025.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP – bi-annual event held in October.
- UN Water Summit – held in 2023 and 2026.
- EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit, November 2025, and other periodic CELAC summits that provide advocacy windows for regional networks to release joint declarations or push for coordinated food policy positions.

**Strategies to deploy**

- Media and communications (unified messaging; storytelling; press and media events; social media)
- Advocacy, lobby and campaigning (early strategic engagement, including pre-event discussions; visual, tailored and evidence-based policy briefs; multiple channels)
- Data (using data)
- Building alliances and solidarity

#### 2.4.1.2 Ongoing global governance spaces and processes allow for continuous influence

A number of ongoing processes and spaces – at the global, regional, national and local levels – present opportunities for influencing food security narratives for climate action. The following list is not exhaustive. Organizations are recommended to actively identify existing and emerging spaces for engagement, or to convene new spaces.

- The CSIPM of the CFS shapes "soft" legislation and guidance (that governments are not obligated to implement).

- The FAO Global roadmap on achieving SDG2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold has been a multi-year process culminating in the launch of country action plans (CAP) at COP30. There will be opportunities to engage in follow-up processes, including advocating implementation of the CAPs.

- The CBD Action Agenda is an on-going opportunity for all stakeholders to make commitments towards reversing biodiversity loss and inspiring others to do the same.

- The Global Alliance Against Poverty and Hunger brings together countries, international organizations, foundations and international financial institutions to support and accelerate efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty (SDGs 1 and 2), while reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

- The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Biennial Review offers formal spaces for non-state actor involvement and advocacy.

- Bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) in West Africa provide opportunities to shape sub-regional policies.

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Agriculture Compacts, supported by the African Development Bank, are important forums for shaping broader narratives on agricultural development and trade.

- The CELAC is a strategic multilateral platform where discussions have increasingly included themes of food sovereignty, indigenous rights and agroecology.

- Multistakeholder platforms (such as food policy councils and food partnerships) exist at the national levels in some countries and are increasingly emerging at the sub-national regional and local levels around the world (especially in urban contexts). These platforms present an opportunity for shaping food security narratives and climate at multiple levels, and especially for ensuring actions are rooted in local needs and wishes.

**Strategies to deploy**

- Media and communications (especially relationship-building with media; social media and campaigns)
- Multistakeholder platforms and processes
- Building alliances and solidarity

#### 2.4.1.3 National strategies and plans, including consultations and multistakeholder platforms, offer opportunities for recurring influence

In all countries there are opportunities to engage in the development and review of climate-related strategies and action plans, and to advocate for the inclusion of food security considerations. Strategies and plans should not be seen as one-off documents but as recurring windows of opportunity, meaning there is potential for continual engagement and incremental improvements over the years to come.

The following non-exhaustive list provides ideas of common policies and plans that organizations may influence:

- **Nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** are country commitments to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, required under the Paris

Agreement. Parties are requested to submit updated NDCs in 2025 and every five years, regardless of implementation time frames.

- **National adaptation plan (NAP)** review processes and Provincial Adaptation Plans (PAPs) should be aligned to and complement NDCs, helping to identify goals and translating them into action.

- **National biodiversity strategies,** developed by countries that committed to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (adopted at the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 in 2022), requires parties to set and implement national targets.

- **National planning and development policies** typically identify climate impacts and include elements on adaptation and mitigation and net zero transition. National planning policies may provide a framework for local plans, which should be developed with the engagement of partners and communities.

- **National resilience strategies** identify the risks faced by a country as a result of various possible shocks and stresses (including climate events), potential impacts, exposure, vulnerabilities and existing resilience capacities. They include preventative measures, mitigation strategies and recovery plans, and typically envisage a collaborative effort between multiple levels of government, the private sector and civil society.

Meanwhile, **national agriculture and fisheries strategies** provide opportunities for shaping food security narratives through the climate adaptation and mitigation measures that are envisaged and implemented.

In some countries that have adopted the food systems approach, **integrated food system strategies** (at national, regional or local level) provide clear opportunities to break down silos and bring together multiple agendas with careful framing of food security and climate that includes resilience, equity and public health. Typically developed through multistakeholder processes, they allow for input from various actors to help shape food security narratives that promote climate action.

**Strategies to deploy**

- Media and communications (all aspects)
- Multistakeholder platforms and processes (engaging in platforms, processes and networks)
- Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning (early strategic engagement; identifying and engaging champions; adapted language; participating in consultations; visual, tailored, evidence-based policy briefs)
- Embedding in policy documents
- Generating and using evidence
- Building alliances and solidarity

#### 2.4.1.4 External events and crises that prompt public dialogue shifts

Key political moments – such as election cycles, political transitions, or even anniversaries of major events – can present opportunities for new narratives to be included in manifestos and campaign platforms. This can play into the desire of new governments to distinguish themselves from what came before, although caution is advised over aligning narratives too closely to one political party, as this increases the risk it will be thrown out by a successor who wishes to break ties with the past.

**Strategies to deploy**

- Media and communications (especially storytelling / human aspect; relationship building with media; social media)
- Building alliances and solidarity
- Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning (adapted language; identifying and engaging champions)
- Building alliances and solidarity (alliances for mutual solidarity)

#### 2.4.1.5 External events can prompt public dialogue shifts

External events can offer opportunities for shaping food security narratives in line with shifts in public discourse. This includes the aftermath of major **climate-related shocks**, when recovery and preventative measures in case of recurrence are top of the agenda. Just as these crises are

sometimes used by governments to justify actions such as increased food imports (see section 2.3.1 on strategic use of narratives), so can organizations use them to connect food security narratives and climate action. One caveat, however, is that these opportunities may be short lived, and once the situation returns to "normal" new narratives may be swiftly abandoned if not sufficiently embedded.

Another event that opened space for broader conversations over food security is **COVID-19**, when there was rising awareness of supply chain issues, labour inequities and systemic failures.

In the United States, the growing **racial justice movement** offers an opening to reframe food security as a civil rights and racial equity issue. This movement has gained traction in philanthropy and local government, making space for food-related narratives centred on justice. The momentum can be used to integrate food security into broader policy reforms, including climate justice, land access and reparations.

**Geopolitical events** have also provided opportunities for shaping food security narratives. For instance, in the United Kingdom Brexit ushered in a new era of public discussion over food security as the country's dependence on imports came under the spotlight. Grain shortages as a result of the war in Ukraine have led to greater global awareness of the dependency on global commodities and the decline in production and consumption of indigenous grains in some parts of the world.

**Strategies to deploy**

- Media and communications
- Building alliances and solidarity

#### 2.4.1.6 Working with sectors on an on-going basis allows for gradual influence

Existing movements among certain sectors can provide opportunities for **ongoing, gradual influence** over food security narratives. This is particularly the case when seeking to influence dominant narratives of **farmers** and certain parts of the **private sector**, such as consumer food manufacturers that rely on commodities. Both these groups are deeply concerned about how they can produce sustainably and remain in business, and are therefore seeking solutions and incentives for behaviour change. As such, they may be targets for "silver bullets" from venture capital and agritech companies that perpetuate productivist narratives for their own profit-driven interests, but which are not necessarily in the long-term interests of food producers.

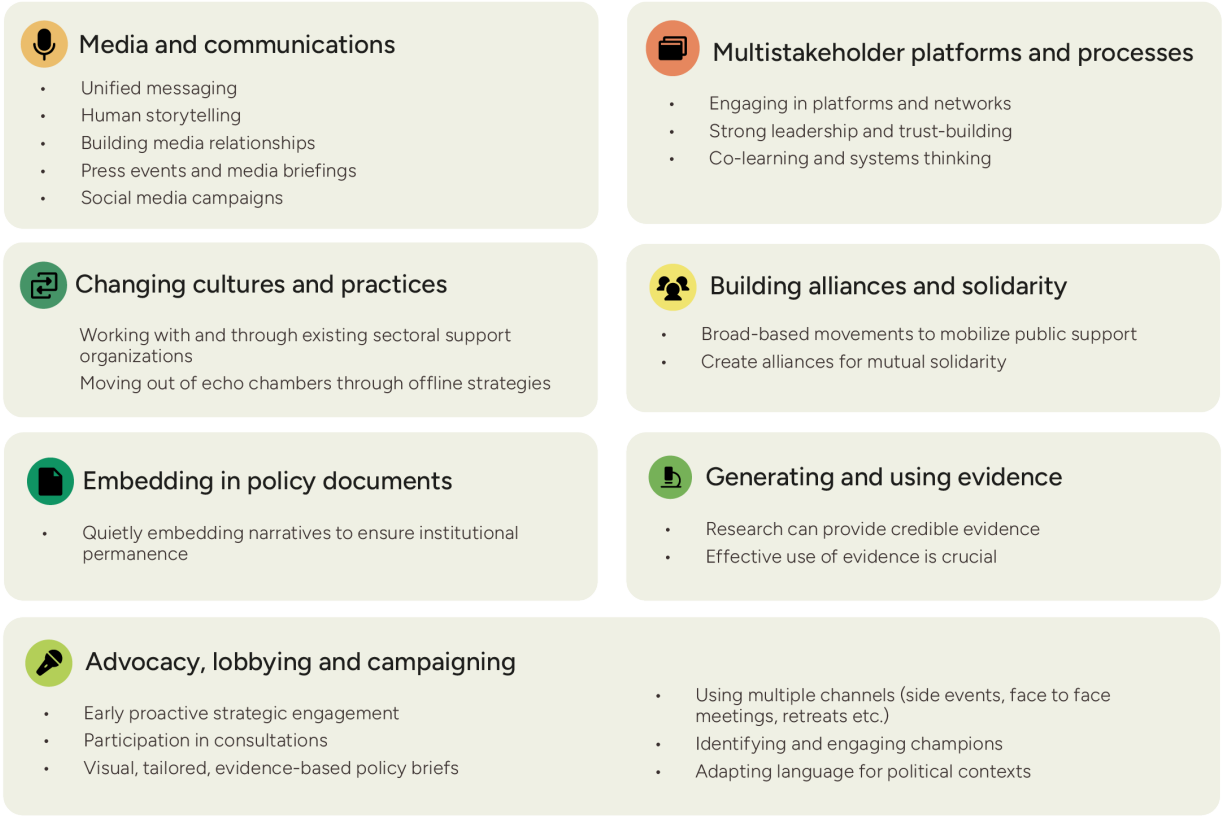
**Strategies to deploy**

- Building alliances and solidarity (alliances for mutual support)
- Changing cultures and practices (sectoral support organizations; moving out of echo chambers; highlighting benefits)

## 2.4.2 Strategies

Strategies for addressing the opportunities are clustered under seven headings:

# Figure 4: Strategies for harnessing food security narratives to advance climate action.




The following sections provide detailed explanations of the strategies.

#### 2.4.2.1 Media and communications

**Unified messaging can amplify impact**

Allied organizations are recommended to develop unified messages using shared, human-centric language and avoiding technical jargon. The messages must include – and explicitly connect – environmental, economic and social themes. Fragmented voices can weaken impact, while coalitions amplify narrative reach. These shared messages can be disseminated through side events, as well as in unified media and social media campaigns, joint statements and cross-sector endorsements.

**Storytelling and human elements can engage audiences**

Advocates of food and climate justice narratives should use a combination of evidence and visual storytelling in their media and communication strategies, with under-represented voices at the centre. This may be in the form of written case studies and photos, video testimonials or in-person presence of Indigenous and community representatives to share their stories directly. This strategy brings to the fore the human aspect and builds understanding of the lived experience of climate change and food security. It helps to capture the attention of decision-makers, who can see how decisions at the global level impact communities, and builds solidarity and mutual support among organizations from different geographies.

**Building media relationships sustains visibility**

Nurturing relationships and building alliances with selected media outlets and journalists can help sustain visibility of narrative messaging over a long period of time. It increases the likelihood that press releases or statements will be picked up. In turn, journalists are also likely to request comment from organizations they know when reporting on relevant topics.

**Press events and media briefings are helpful to disseminate key positions**

Press events and media briefings can be especially helpful for broadcasting positions around summits and events, national and sub-national strategies and plans, political moments and public dialogue shifts, as well as publication of new evidence to inform food security narratives. Including Indigenous and community representatives can help amplify narratives and ground them in the realities of lived experience, as established media will hear from people they would not normally be able to access.

**Social media campaigns can drive engagement**

Social media campaigns are useful for maintaining engagement among groups, organizations and individuals who are already somewhat engaged in food security and climate actions, and

potentially drawing in people who are concerned about food security or climate but have yet to make firm connections between the two. Social media is critical to the dissemination of position statements and new data. However, there is always a risk that it will reach those who are already in the "echo chamber" of certain narratives and therefore may not reach policy – or decision makers who are the primary advocacy targets.

#### 2.4.2.2 Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning

**Early strategic engagement shapes policy proactively**

Strategic engagement with key actors at the start of a policy process can be a way to shape food security narratives proactively, rather than reacting to and seeking to re-shape narratives that have already been put forward by others. In some places, public participation processes or consultations come late in the day and may be largely tokenistic.

**Participating in consultations can enhance influence**

Nonetheless, it can still be helpful to take part in consultations, especially those that invite public or stakeholder input as they can be crucial points for injecting or reinforcing alternative narratives. This may involve submitting written views (via an online platform) or, in some instances, participating in roundtables that are organized to ensure the inclusion of community voices. Even in cases where direct participation in a consultation is not possible (whether due to exclusion or practical reasons), stakeholders can send written views directly to the department responsible.

**Visual, tailored, evidence-based policy briefs are more effective**

Evidence-based policy briefs are the mainstay of influencing government at the national level. It is suggested that they be short, visually engaging and tailored to specific decision-makers. Their recommendations must be culturally and contextually relevant. They should combine storytelling with data and contain clear, actionable recommendations. Using infographics and scenario modelling helps to clarify consequences and trade-offs. The goal is to make the narrative easy to grasp and politically appealing within the constraints of the policymaker's role.

**Using multiple channels expands the reach**

In addition to policy briefs, organizations are advised to use multiple channels for advocacy and information, using consistent but tailored messages for each. Depending on the nature of the opportunity, this can include:

1. Side events, workshops or dialogues (see under Multistakeholder platforms and processes)
2. Face-to-face meetings with delegates or key decision-makers
3. In-person introductions to community representatives to hear or see the impacts of climate events on grassroots food security
4. Field exposure visits, either to demonstrate problems or to show the feasibility and value of successful models and alternative approaches
5. Retreats, which involve taking key people out of their day-to-day environment to make the case for agency in a neutral setting and to co-create new understandings and actions.

**Identifying and engaging champions builds support**

Leveraging the influence of trusted community figures, such as religious or cultural leaders, can be a powerful way to shift mindsets and build support.

In some contexts, high profile, charismatic public figures (such as celebrity chefs or footballers) can be persuasive messengers when they are passionate about a narrative. They can present facts and figures, while humanizing the issues.

Where possible, identifying and engaging supportive politicians as champions for change can be an effective way of influencing narratives from within government. In some cases, these politicians may be prepared to become involved in, or interact with, civil society campaigns.

Using both politicians and community or public figures can create an influential "pincer movement", with some people working on the inside and some on the outside.

**Adapting language for political contexts**

It may be necessary to adapt language use – either to avoid running counter to dominant political feeling or to "speak the language" of governments or donors so that messages appear to be familiar. Where terms or narratives have been used interpretively to mean different things, it is important to be very precise about their intended meaning in each context.

#### 2.4.2.3 Embedding in policy documents

**Embedding narratives can ensure institutional permanence**

Where there is already significant internal government support for food security narratives that promote climate action, especially among technical staff, it may be possible to quietly embed food security narratives within municipal development plans or sectoral strategies, without triggering political resistance. This approach relies on understanding how policy documents are

written and approved. By inserting the right terms in the right places, narratives can gain institutional permanence, even without major political buy-in.

#### 2.4.2.4 Multistakeholder platforms and processes

**Engaging in platforms and networks fosters influence**

Multistakeholder platforms and processes are key venues for embedding food security and climate narratives. They include government, civil society, the private sector and (often) academia, allowing for diverse perspectives to influence policy. They are recurring and (ideally) institutionalized, offering long-term advocacy opportunities. These spaces enable the formal recognition of agroecology and justice-centred models and are helpful for translating grassroots concerns into policy language, making them ideal platforms for sustained narrative influence.

When it comes to consultations and policy negotiation, support from multistakeholder platforms – or even joint positions – can lend legitimacy and weight to campaigns.

Other consultative platforms and networks may be sectoral, but nonetheless provide useful infrastructure for dialogue, collaboration and sustainable advocacy work. These include national farmer federations, private sector associations, faith-based organizations, youth associations and academic institutions.

**Strong leadership and trust-building are essential**

Multistakeholder platforms are valuable spaces for dialogue, building shared understanding and building trust – especially with people on the front-line of food production or with lived experience of food insecurity, whose priorities and experiences should be central to developing actions.

Strong leadership and convening skills are needed to ensure these platforms are safe spaces where all stakeholders are empowered to participate in a meaningful way, without repercussions, and where all views are heard and taken into account. It may be necessary to adapt formats and processes to cultural norms.

**Co-learning and systems thinking drive shared understanding**

Multistakeholder platforms are also valuable spaces for collective learning, with different participants sharing experiences that shape their values, perspectives and priorities that others would not otherwise be aware of. Methodologies that are based on systems thinking can help people to understand the connections and shift mindsets towards greater understanding.

#### 2.4.2.5 Changing cultures and practices

**Sectoral support organizations disseminate narratives**

Working with and through existing sectoral support organizations – such as trade organizations and farmers' extension services – can help shape new narratives on food security and climate action tend to trickle down to their members or subscribers, especially when intentionally crafted narrative messages are used in reports, guidelines and events (their own and others', such as COPs), on social media and through their participation in multistakeholder platforms.

**Moving out of echo chambers requires offline strategies**

Professional social media, such as LinkedIn, can help build alliances and coalitions. However, narratives tend to be shared in "echo chambers" of likeminded people. It is therefore suggested to combine social media with off-line strategies to help all business leaders – including those for whom sustainability is not part of their core role – to help them understand the imperatives. This can include in-person visits and presentations to procurement teams or the entire staff.

**Highlighting benefits motivates business change**

When you want businesses to change their practices, it is not enough to merely present them with solutions. Increasingly there is a need to frame arguments in terms of building resilience in supply chains, improving risk-management and providing access to finance, thereby maintaining a license to operate and strengthening the supplier base.

#### 2.4.2.6 Building alliances and solidarity

**Broad-based movements mobilize public support**

Campaigns led by civil society and grassroots movements can mobilize public support and bring community narratives into public discourse and policy agendas at the right time. Building broad-based movements and alliances is a foundational strategy for reversing power imbalances and influencing policy. Grassroots and national movements that include a wide range of actors (e.g. youth, Indigenous groups, farmers and other citizens) can have a powerful collective voice in food and climate justice movements (or caravans) that build sustained pressure and visibility.

**Alliances for mutual solidarity strengthen movements**

Networking with allied organizations in the food and climate space, at both grassroots and national level, can create greater pressure and visibility.

Creating alliances with those that address specific social or environmental issues can help build a wider movement, increasing understanding of these issues are affected by – or affect – food security.

Participating in local and national events (e.g. discussions, rallies, demonstrations) around issues such as climate change, land justice and other social problems is a good way to build solidarity across movements, as well as to mobilize the public.

#### 2.4.2.7 Building alliances and solidarity

**Research can provide credible evidence**

Many of the strategies set out above depend on the availability of credible evidence. This involves supporting or conducting rigorous, locally grounded research to challenge dominant narratives and offer viable alternatives.

**Effective use of evidence is crucial**

Evidence can be used in multiple ways, for different audiences. Specialist communications agencies can help model how different data sets and messaging will play out with different demographics. Sharing of data should not be a one-off exercise but drip-fed at key moments to help keep issues on the agenda and to highlight different aspects according to need.

Generally, however, data should be translated into formats that policymakers can understand, as they do not often read long reports containing overly academic language. Infographics, dashboards and one-page briefs can be very helpful.

Civil servants, on the other hand, may wish to have more detailed reports. For the media, different strands of data can be woven into articles and stories to support narratives.

## 2.5 Needs and recommendations

The findings point to clear needs and capacity gaps in shaping food security narratives that also advance climate goals. Philanthropic funding will be most effective when it is directed to country- and sub-national initiatives that place communities' lived experience at the centre. Local relevance and self-determination are essential if climate and food-security actions are to succeed.

We make the following recommendations to philanthropic foundations:

1. Establish **locally managed funding mechanisms** for stakeholders and communities to determine their own priority issues and solutions, and to allocate budget accordingly.

2. Invest in **localized research systems and knowledge co-creation** with local and traditional communities and Indigenous Peoples.
3. Provide funding for direct and meaningful **community participation and advocacy** in global arenas.
4. Enable **training and capacity building** in: strategic communications and media skills; cross-sector fluency and food systems; legal processes and political strategy; and coalition-building, leadership and relationship management.
5. Shore up **communications capabilities and knowledge platforms**.
6. Promote **massive awareness building** accompanied by support and training packages to help smallholders navigate the transition to practices that promote climate resilience and mitigation.

### 2.5.1 Support locally managed funding to empower communities

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Many low-income countries in the Global South are locked into foreign aid cycles and are unable to access development funds. Philanthropic foundations have tended to follow development agencies in providing short-term emergency aid rather than funding for long-term development, including environmental management and stewardship to promote food sovereignty (and therefore food security). Funds tend to be managed from the Global North and designated for use in accordance with donors' priorities, with limited understanding of local issues and solutions nor why actions that have worked in one context in the Global South may not be suitable or possible in another quite different context. There is also a tendency to provide food aid or other in-kind support rather than cash, which limits communities' ability to determine their own needs and to spend accordingly. This is likely due to a lack of trust or the belief that all government systems are beset by corruption.

#### Recommendation:

**Philanthropic foundations should establish funds to be managed by local stakeholders that would allow communities to determine their own priority issues and solutions, and to allocate budget accordingly.** This would allow them to designate funds for environmental management and stewardship to promote food sovereignty, and therefore food security.

This is particularly pertinent in the current climate, given the dismantling of USAID and reductions in other international development funds. The human, financial and material resources of civil society groups are the underpinnings of food security and climate action work. They need to be supported with permanent advocacy mechanisms for data collection and stakeholder analysis at the local level, with sufficient and sustained funding and staff who have expertise in specific technical and political areas.

### 2.5.2 Invest in localized research systems and knowledge co-creation

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Currently, there is insufficient robust evidence demonstrating how climate change initiatives can directly address food security, or how food security strategies can contribute to climate mitigation. This lack of conclusive data undermines efforts to build integrated narratives and secure policy alignment.

In Latin America, a major gap exists in linking food, nutrition, biodiversity, forest maintenance and water security through data. Without strong monitoring systems or locally relevant indicators, claims connecting these elements remain largely anecdotal. This weakens their influence on policy and planning processes.

In Africa, research is often shaped by external funder agendas rather than grounded in local priorities. There is a pressing need for research that is rigorous, context-specific and co-created with communities. Indigenous knowledge systems are frequently excluded from formal research, limiting the relevance and applicability of findings.

In India and other parts of Asia, there is still considerable scepticism over the viability of transitioning to alternative farming practices. A key concern is whether yields can be maintained if farmers shift inputs or adopt agroecological approaches. Without clear, location-specific evidence that productivity will not be compromised (or will only decrease marginally), many farmers remain hesitant, fearing loss of livelihood.

#### Recommendation:

**Philanthropic foundations should invest in localized, community-driven research systems**. This includes resources for collecting and analysing data, developing context-sensitive indicators and building user-friendly tools (such as dashboards or metrics) that can inform decision-making by ministries and policy planners.

Support should also go towards co-creating knowledge with local communities, ensuring that research responds to real needs and integrates Indigenous and experiential knowledge. Communities themselves need training and support to articulate their priorities, contribute to research design and communicate findings effectively.

Finally, foundations could fund targeted studies to produce credible, region-specific evidence about the impacts of shifting agricultural practices, particularly on yields. Demonstrating that sustainable approaches can maintain (or nearly maintain) current productivity levels is essential to overcoming resistance among producers and building trust in alternative pathways.

### 2.5.3 Support locally managed funding to empower communities

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Grassroots actors frequently face financial barriers that prevent them from participating meaningfully in policy spaces. Costs related to travel, translation and preparation are often unfunded, effectively excluding those with valuable insights and lived experience from critical discussions. Their exclusion is not due to a lack of ideas, but a lack of access and resources.

This exclusion is particularly pronounced for actors from the Caribbean, small island developing states, parts of Africa and countries like Sri Lanka, where limited national capacity further compounds the challenge. These regions often lack the resources to participate in regional and global policy processes or to contest dominant narratives, especially those that fail to integrate climate imperatives with local food security concerns.

#### Recommendation:

**Philanthropic foundations should provide dedicated, flexible funding to support the full participation of grassroots and community-based actors in policy processes.** This includes covering the costs of travel, translation, logistics, convening and the production of advocacy tools such as policy briefs and presentations. Support should also extend to relationship-building and sustained engagement, not just one-off events.

Core, long-term funding for advocacy is essential – not just for presence in policy spaces, but to enable meaningful contribution to agenda-setting and outcomes. Funding should be strategic and unrestricted, allowing grassroots actors to respond to emerging opportunities and build coalitions across sectors and regions.

Finally, enabling participation also requires a shift in how engagement is structured. Philanthropic foundations could support initiatives that aim to create space for grassroots voices to be heard by policy makers on an equal footing with other, more conventionally powerful stakeholders, both through formal channels and in ways that allow emotional expression and authentic dialogue.

### 2.5.4 Build capacity through targeted training

Training and capacity building needs were identified in several areas:

#### 2.5.4.1 Strategic communications and media skills

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Strategic communications and media skills are often underdeveloped among key groups involved in shaping narratives that connect political food security and climate action. These groups include civil society actors, local leaders, academics and climate scientists. As a result, the evidence they present and the stories they tell may fail to reach or resonate with their intended audiences.

### Recommendations:

**Philanthropic foundations should fund training for civil society organizations and academic advocates at all levels in effective communication and storytelling, across a range of platforms.** They need to be able to craft messages that resonate across diverse political and cultural contexts – whether engaging with the media, policymakers or the public. This includes an understanding that the impact of a narrative depends significantly on who delivers it, how it is delivered and the framing used.

**Philanthropy can support local leaders in building their narrative power, facilitating stronger linkages between grassroots initiatives and national policy processes.** This ensures that community voices are not marginalized. Support should include media training, tailored communications assistance and access to digital infrastructure that enables communities to tell their own stories. Importantly, this support must be sustained over time, not limited to short-term project cycles.

**Philanthropy can also support training for scientists and science communicators in how to deliver consistent, impactful messaging on climate change and its links to food security.** This involves shifting from episodic communication – focused on major reports like those from the IPCC – to strategies that account for limited attention spans and promote ongoing public engagement.

#### 2.5.4.2 Cross-sector fluency and food systems

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Many actors working on food security, climate action or other related areas (such as public health or planning) operate within sectoral silos. They use discipline specific language and focus narrowly on their core areas. This limits their ability to collaborate across fields and weakens efforts to shape integrated narratives that align food security and climate imperatives. Advocates, too, often speak only to their own communities, missing opportunities for broader influence.

There is a notable lack of shared knowledge and mutual understanding between sectors. For example, food system actors may lack basic fluency in climate science or political economy, while climate advocates may not be familiar with the complexities of food systems. The limited ability to understand and communicate across these divides hinders narrative alignment and cross-sector engagement.

Moreover, while the food systems lens is gaining traction internationally and in select national contexts, it is not universally adopted. In some country contexts it is perceived as abstract or as an external imposition, creating resistance in favour of on-going siloism.

## Recommendations:

**Philanthropic foundations should contribute to bridging these knowledge and communication gaps through interdisciplinary training and the creation of collaborative spaces where actors from different sectors can learn from each other.** Training should equip food system thinkers with a working understanding of climate science and political economy, and climate specialists with food systems thinking. This would enable each to frame narratives that resonate across disciplines.

Actors seeking to influence policy need support to translate their ideas into language that is relevant and compelling to diverse sectors, including health, agriculture, education and climate. This includes building communication skills (both written and oral) and cultivating an understanding of different institutional cultures and policy environments.

Applying a food systems lens can serve as a powerful tool for fostering integration, as it emphasizes the interconnections between food, health, the economy and the environment. Training government employees in systems thinking, and in alternative food security narratives, can increase receptivity to new ideas and approaches.

**Philanthropic foundations could also contribute to building the next generation of climate and food systems professionals who are literate in both food systems and climate worlds.** This can facilitate educators' curriculum development to integrate hard skills, such as understanding modelling projections, understanding potential solutions and effective application of knowledge in government or private sector settings.

#### 2.5.4.3 Training in legal processes and political strategy

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Community organizations and sectoral actors (such as climate scientists, farm leaders and public health professionals) often lack the knowledge and capacity to engage effectively in legal and policy processes. This includes limited understanding of how laws are made, how public budgets are allocated and how institutions function. Without this knowledge, these actors face barriers to inserting their concerns into policymaking and influencing decisions that affect food security and climate outcomes.

There is also a general lack of familiarity with policy cycles at national, regional and international levels. Many actors are unaware of when and how to intervene in these cycles to maximize impact. This limits their ability to contribute meaningfully to the development and implementation of relevant policies.

### Recommendations:

**Philanthropic foundations should fund targeted training to build fluency in legal frameworks, policy development and political strategy.** This includes understanding how to identify key moments for intervention, how to navigate political institutions and how to engage strategically across different levels of governance.

**Capacity-building efforts should also equip actors with the skills to translate research findings and community knowledge into formats and messages that are influential in policy spaces.** Strengthening this capacity will help ensure that evidence and lived experience inform decision-making processes more effectively.

#### 2.5.4.4 Coalition-building, leadership and relationship management

**Needs and capacity gaps:** In the fields of food security and climate action, there is a general lack of soft skills necessary to build and sustain effective coalitions, such as trust-building, conflict navigation, consensus-building and facilitation. At the same time, leadership capacity is limited, particularly when it comes to systems thinking, collaborative problem-solving and willingness to take risks or adopt new approaches. This contributes to a reliance on familiar practices and a reluctance to innovate, reinforcing the status quo.

Collaboration across sectors remains weak, with few opportunities for genuine co-development of solutions. Coalition-building is often treated as a short-term, campaign-oriented effort rather than a long-term investment in mutual support and shared strategy. In many contexts, tensions around the question of who “owns” food security further complicate

collective action. These dynamics can lead to territorial behaviour and exclusion of less visible actors from key discussions and decision-making spaces.

## Recommendations:

**Philanthropists should support the development of durable, long-term coalitions that are capable of navigating political systems and sustaining strategic influence over time.** In regions such as Africa, this requires strengthened capacity for stakeholder engagement and collaboration, including fostering partnerships among governments, NGOs, researchers and communities. These alliances must be able to work with multiple perspectives and shape narratives collectively.

To do so effectively, actors need to develop the soft skills of influence, knowing which champions to approach, which respected organizations to partner with, and how to cut through political noise to reach key decision-makers. At the same time, leadership training should focus on systems leadership and innovation, building the facilitation and collaboration skills needed to lead change and break out of entrenched institutional habits. Actors must feel empowered not just to participate, but to take ownership of solutions and lead transformative efforts.

In some countries, there is untapped capacity within academia, student bodies, NGOs and international partners that could be activated to support bridge-building across sectors. These actors can play a key role in facilitating cross-sector learning and collaboration through training, co-creation processes and long-term partnerships.

Philanthropic investment should prioritize inclusive coalition-building by reaching beyond the most visible or established actors. Supporting underrepresented voices across the food system can help mitigate territorial dynamics and foster cooperation across the value chain. With the right support, coalitions can become more than vehicles for advocacy. They can serve as engines of innovation, collective ownership and long-term change.

### 2.5.5 Strengthen communications and knowledge platforms

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Many organizations that promote alternative food security narratives lack the financial resources and internal capacity to communicate effectively. This includes the ability to present evidence of efficacy, share local experiences and influence policy through strategic messaging. In the absence of dedicated communications teams, these organizations often struggle to make their messages accessible and compelling to wider audiences.

There is also limited capacity among counter media outlets, such as independent podcasts, newsletters (e.g. Substacks) and informal media networks, to influence mainstream narratives. Although a wealth of alternative content is being produced, it is often difficult to navigate and remains confined within ideological or interest-based echo chambers. Even when powerful voices emerge from these spaces, they are frequently marginalized or dismissed by mainstream media as fringe or lacking credibility.

#### Recommendations:

**Philanthropists should fund communication service providers that can partner with mission-driven organizations to digest complex research and field-based knowledge into accessible outputs, such as summaries, policy briefs and digital media content.** These intermediaries play a critical role in amplifying underrepresented narratives and should be recognized as essential actors in the ecosystem.

Investment is needed to strengthen the infrastructure of counter media. This includes building platforms or repositories where curated, credible and diverse content can be easily accessed and shared across networks. Training in content curation, audience targeting and strategic amplification can also help elevate alternative voices and ensure they reach beyond their immediate circles.

### 2.5.6 Foster public support and enable transition

**Needs and capacity gaps:** Despite broad agreement among experts, civil society actors and some government actors (albeit often in private), in some contexts (such as India) there is currently no widespread public legitimacy for food production methods that prioritize climate mitigation, ecology and biodiversity. This lack of mass awareness and acceptance presents a barrier to support for scaling up agroecological practices and integrating them into national food and climate strategies.

Without strong public narratives that explain the benefits in relatable and compelling ways, the transition remains stalled. Moreover, presentation of evidence alone is unlikely to generate the necessary societal momentum for change without accompanying support systems.

## Recommendations:

**Philanthropic foundations should fund large-scale awareness campaigns that make agroecological approaches visible, credible and culturally resonant.** These campaigns should be designed to reach diverse audiences and address common misconceptions, while highlighting the relevance of agroecology to food security, health and livelihoods.

Alongside narrative-building, a comprehensive support package is essential to enable farmers and communities to make the transition. This should mirror the kind of coordinated backing that accompanied the Green Revolution, including clear guidance on how to adopt new practices, access to necessary inputs and equipment at affordable prices, and hands-on technical support. A more recent model is the Indian government's campaign to increase production and consumption of millets, which received UN backing through the declaration of 2023 as International Year of Millets.

Training programmes must be established to build local capacity and ensure that farmers are not left to navigate the shift alone. A combination of awareness-building and practical support is key to securing long-term, systemic change.

# 3. Conclusion

There is growing acknowledgement that all governments, agencies and organizations need to address food security and climate change (mitigation and adaptation) not as separate problems, but as interconnected parts of a global crisis. This report finds that stories we tell about food – or narratives – are a primary way in which these agendas may be aligned or segregated. The findings reveal a clear, though complex, path forward for shaping these narratives to create greater, more meaningful, alignment between political food security goals and climate action, while also responding to distinct regional needs.

Achieving this alignment is difficult. The report identifies several significant barriers that maintain the divide between food and climate agendas. Pervasive power imbalances allow productivist narratives, backed by influential corporate and state actors, to dominate policy discussions. This frequently marginalizes alternative approaches, such as agroecology and food sovereignty. Progress is also obscured by the strategic use of language. Terms like “resilience” and “sustainability” are often adopted by competing interests, creating a narrative fog that masks true intentions and hinders genuine change. Furthermore, dramatic political shifts can rapidly undo years of progress, while entrenched institutional silos ensure that food and climate policies continue to be developed in isolation.

Despite these challenges, this report has identified a viable strategy for change. The most effective intervention is not to directly oppose productivist narratives (which have overwhelming institutional backing) but to strategically elevate and resource alternatives. Simultaneously, philanthropy should work to expose the gap between productivist climate rhetoric and actual climate outcomes, making visible how corporate-driven "solutions" perpetuate the very systems driving emissions.

Shaping narratives effectively requires a multi-pronged, context-aware approach that combines the right messenger with the right message, at the right moment.

First, the credibility of the messenger is paramount. Alignment depends on building broad and sometimes unconventional coalitions that bridge divides between civil society, farmers’ movements, academics and progressive private sector actors. The report shows that amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples, women and smallholder farmers, can be particularly powerful.

Second, the message itself must be crafted to resonate. Successful narratives blend credible, quantifiable evidence with relatable, human-centric storytelling. This involves moving beyond technical jargon and using language that connects with the specific values of an audience,

whether that is economic stability for policymakers, secure livelihoods for farmers or social justice for communities.

Finally, these interventions must be timed to take advantage of key opportunities. The report highlights that "policy windows" (such as global summits like COP30, national policy reviews, or moments of crisis) create crucial openings to introduce new narratives and influence agendas.

It is important to note that there is no universal narrative for aligning food security and climate action. The most effective narratives are not imposed globally but are instead grounded in local and regional realities. In Latin America, for example, a successful narrative may centre on food sovereignty as an act of decolonialization. For the UK, the most resonant message might be about civil food resilience or a rights-based approach to tackling food poverty. In parts of Africa and South Asia, the path forward involves navigating the persistent tension between state-led self-sufficiency goals and community-driven agroecology. Success, therefore, depends on empowering local actors to lead. As this report recommends, this requires direct investment in their capacity through locally managed funding, support for knowledge co-creation and targeted training in advocacy and strategic communication.

Ultimately, shaping food security narratives is more than a communications exercise. It is the fundamental work of shifting power, rebuilding the relationship between people and the planet, and generating the political will required for a more just, equitable and resilient future.

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# Annex 1: Food security narratives

This annex contains a detailed explanation of the loose typology of food security narratives types identified in this research project.

The typology is intended as an analytical tool rather than a definitive framework. We intend for it to spark debate and discussion around how food security narratives can be harnessed and amplified – or effectively countered – to build support for climate action.

Given the nuanced and dynamic nature of food security narratives, the typology is relatively simple, featuring 14 narrative types. Where there is a strong climate (adaptation or mitigation) dimension, this is highlighted. The narrative types are pluralized because narratives are not expressed in precisely the same terms by all stakeholders and in all geographies. This means it has been necessary to identify equivalence and similarities between contexts and users.

For some of the narrative types, variants of the narrative theme were detected. These are introduced in sub-headings.

## 3.1 Agroecology

### Key arguments:

- Food security is possible through farming systems that work in harmony with ecological principles.
- Focus on long-term sustainability
- Food security is durable only if ecosystems can recover from shocks

Typically used by grassroots social movements, smallholder groups, environmental NGO's, academics, Indigenous groups, some government departments.

**Core values:** environmental sustainability; human rights, equity and social justice.

**Can be connected to:** food sovereignty; climate resilience and justice; right to food.

**Opposed to:** productivist.

**Agroecology narratives on food security** position agroecology as a food production system that addresses climate change, environmental degradation and inequality through ecologically sound and culturally grounded practices. Agroecology integrates ecological principles with social justice, sustainability and traditional knowledge systems, offering an alternative to industrial agriculture.

While agroecology is regarded as a component of the broader food sovereignty movement, it can also be a stand-alone narrative, where the focus is on how food is produced. It is typically used by grassroots social movements, smallholders, environmental NGOs, academics, Indigenous groups and some government departments.

In **India**, agroecology is closely associated with the food sovereignty narrative, with smallholders championing traditional agroecological practices (such as biodiverse cropping, seed saving and low-input soil management) that offer sustainable production over the long term – while being inherently more equitable, sustainable and resilient than industrial models. Traditional knowledge and agroecological methods are recognized as vital to ensuring food security, while curbing corporate influence ultimately benefits both producers and consumers.

In **Latin America**, particularly in Brazil, agroecology has deep roots in both academic research and grassroots social movements. Organizations such as the Brazilian Association of Agroecology (ABA) and National Confederation of Rural Workers (CONTAG) describe agroecology as a science, a political movement and social practice that brings together diverse bodies of knowledge in a transdisciplinary, systemic way (ABA, n.d.; CONTAG, n.d.). Government institutions have formally supported the narrative. **Brazil's** National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production (PNAPO), launched in 2012, represents one such effort, although its implementation has faced challenges (Brasil, 2012). The narrative here also emphasizes agroecology's role in rural revitalization, women's empowerment and intergenerational knowledge transfer through its demand for collective family participation in complex, integrated farming systems.

In **Canada**, an agroecology for resilience narrative focuses on sustainability and biodiversity, while closely aligning with state climate adaptation strategies. It combines beneficial management practices with agroecological principles to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, restore soil health and strengthen resilience against climate disruptions. Supported by environmental NGOs, academics, Indigenous groups and government departments like Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, this approach emphasizes environmental and economic risk mitigation, but it generally stops short of advocating for deep structural transformation of the food system.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CARE

While not labelled as agroecological per se, in **Indonesia** an environmental care narrative links food security to biodiverse, healthy terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Two key pathways within planetary boundaries are environmental preservation (restricting resource use) and human-environment co-benefits (promoting sustainable interactions through conservation and management). Both support long-term sustainability of agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries. This approach is embodied in Indonesia's Blue Foods strategy (Bappenas, 2024), integrating marine and coastal ecosystem conservation to boost food security and livelihoods. Blue foods face threats from climate change, plastic pollution and overfishing, making ecosystem care vital for resilience and sustaining food production.

In **Sri Lanka**, the sudden and disastrous policy to ban chemical fertilizers in 2021 was driven in part by an environmental care narrative, as it was part of an effort to push the country towards organic agriculture on environmental, public health and economic grounds. The policy failure revealed the dangers of top-down decision-making without farmer consultation or scientific grounding – and, as a consequence of a decline in yields and worsened food insecurity, caused significant harm to the environmental care narrative in the country.

## 3.2 Civil food resilience

### Key arguments:

- 'Whole of society' approach needed where citizens prepared to act collectively to ensure everyone remains fed during and after crises.

Typically used by academics, local governments, local food partnerships/food policy councils.

**Core values:** human rights, equity and social justice; decentralization.

**Can be connected to:** climate resilience and justice; localization and sub-national; right to food.

Civil food resilience is an emerging narrative that refers to "the capacity of people in their daily lives to be more aware of risks to food, more skilled in reducing unnecessary risks, and more

prepared to act with others to ensure all society is well fed in and after crises," (Lang et al, 2025).

In the **UK**, the main proponents of this narrative are the National Preparedness Commission, academics and food policy professionals, who argue that concerted efforts to build learning, capacity and preparedness are needed, across the whole of society. The same approach has been deployed by subnational food partnerships for several years but using different language, such as local food systems, local food economies and community-based initiatives.

With an emphasis on the right to nutritious food, public participation and decentralized action, proposed measures include legislation requiring government to ensure food during crises; assigning food preparedness roles across government levels; creating a National Council of Food Security and Resilience for ongoing advice; and enhancing National and Community Risk Registers to better capture local food risks and responses, including community audits of food assets and infrastructure.

In **Canada**, this narrative is advanced through the 2019 Food Policy for Canada by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, NGOs, civil society, academics, local governments, Indigenous Peoples and food industries (AAFC, 2019). The Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council advises on food issues, facilitates dialogue and identifies policy gaps. It emphasizes supporting producers and communities with policies, institutions and infrastructure informed by local knowledge. Core values include reconciliation through a rights-based, self-determination approach, alongside inclusivity, diversity, equity, intersectionality, economic growth, sustainability and accountability.

## 3.3 Climate resilience and justice

### Key arguments:

- We must build capacities against climate events and other crises throughout the food system, which can have a dramatic effect on food security, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Maintaining food security requires minimising disruption to domestic and imported food supplies.

Typically used by some governments (especially regarding supply chains), resilience/planning departments, international NGOs / CSOs, Indigenous groups.

**Core values:** environmental sustainability; human rights, equity and social justice.

**Can be connected to:** agroecology; planetary health; civil food resilience; nutrition and health; food systems transformation; food sovereignty; Global North responsibility; right to food.

Climate resilience and justice narratives acknowledge the imperative of building capacities against climate shocks and stresses and other crises (including geopolitical events) throughout the food system, which can have a dramatic impact on food security. Climate shocks and stresses have a disproportionate impact on low income, marginalized and under-resourced communities, especially in countries that have the least responsibility for the drivers of climate change. Resilience is also associated with maintaining supply chain infrastructure to minimize disruption to domestic and imported food supplies, particularly on the part of governments.

These narratives are typically used by international NGOs, CSOs and Indigenous groups, and some governments. Use is also increasing on the global stage. The Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centered Climate Action, endorsed by 44 countries at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP30) in November 2025, noted that taking a strong, human-centred climate response will contribute to just transitions and the realization of the human right to adequate food and other human rights. (UNCC, 2025).

In **India**, the climate resilience and justice narrative is containing in several government plans, including the National Action Plan on Food Security and Climate Change, first launched in 2008, which prioritizes securing food supply chains, enhancing the nutritional quality of food

and reducing risks from extreme weather events (MHFW, 2024). Climate change is understood as threatening both food security and the foundations of health and nutrition, deepening existing inequalities. In addition to threatening food production, rising carbon dioxide levels reduce the protein and mineral content of staple crops, exacerbating 'hidden hunger' in a country where pulses are a vital protein source. At the same time, higher temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns drive the spread of water- and vector-borne diseases, particularly in informal settlements with limited access to sanitation and healthcare.

In **Latin America** this narrative type has been used by Oxfam in a strategic initiative in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua that presents the climate justice goals for traditional people (Oxfam, 2023). Oxfam also supported the production of the report Look at Hunger ('Olhe para a fome'), coordinated by the Brazilian Food and Nutrition Security Network (PENSSAN) in 2021, which revealed Brazil's return to the hunger map (PENSSAN, 2021). However, in the 2022-2023-2024 triennial average, the country recorded a level below 2.5 percent of its population at risk of malnutrition or lack of access to sufficient food. On July 28 2025, FAO announced at the UNFSS+4 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that Brazil is no longer on the Hunger Map (FAO et al, 2025).

**Canada's** Action Plan for Food Security, launched in 1998 and updated in 2006 (AAFC, 2006), frames food security around human rights, social justice and sustainable resource management. It includes domestic initiatives like social welfare, poverty reduction, health disparity efforts and programmes for vulnerable groups – especially Indigenous communities – alongside sustainable agriculture. Internationally, it focuses on sharing knowledge and resources through agencies like the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC) to support developing countries. This narrative is supported by the Canadian government, NGOs and civil society organizations. Responsibility for action is shared across multiple partners rather than resting on any single entity, emphasizing cooperation and partnership to achieve food security goals.

**RACIAL EQUITY**

In the **United States**, a related narrative puts racial equity at the centre of policies and practice to support food system resilience at the local level, with improved understanding of the intersections between race, local food, climate hazards and resilience. Systemic racism has perpetuated food insecurity among minorities; this has been especially exposed by and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Solutions include local initiatives to promote racial equity and food justice, including policy changes, community empowerment and urban agriculture. Grounded in values like equity, sustainability, resilience, conservation and food sovereignty, this narrative is championed by community organizations, such as the Black Farmer Fund and National Black Food and Justice Alliance, alongside researchers, NGOs and think tanks.

A second narrative strand in **Canada**, used by NGOs such as CARE and supported by governments and global partners, maintains that food systems should be purposefully designed to be sustainable, productive, equitable and resilient. This narrative centres on sustainable and nutrition-sensitive intensification to increase yields, adapt to climate change and protect ecosystems, crucially identifying systemic power imbalances and gender inequities as key drivers of food insecurity, particularly for smallholder farmers and marginalized groups.

### RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

In the **United Kingdom**, the resilient supply chains narrative focuses on minimizing disruptions to domestic and imported food supplies, highlighting vulnerabilities in interconnected systems like energy, transport and communications. Featured in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affair's (DEFRA) 2018 National Adaptation Strategy and Climate Change Committee reports (DEFRA, 2018), it assigns responsibility to government and private sectors. Recommendations include investing in resilient infrastructure, encouraging private adaptation and insurance, reducing food loss, promoting private investment in food manufacturing and establishing sustainability metrics for soil health, carbon and biodiversity. Advocates also support transparent data monitoring and a cross-sector food security body, linking this narrative to the food systems approach.

A similar narrative in **Canada**, voiced by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials and diverse food system stakeholders, emphasizes adaptability, long-term planning, efficiency, collaboration, informed decision-making and public trust. It shifts from viewing supply chain disruptions as isolated events to recognizing frequent, converging crises with compounding impacts. This narrative calls for improved agri-food policies, emergency planning and response strategies to handle sudden disruptions. Practical and technological solutions include farm-based practices, research, business risk management and ecological approaches. Specifically for food supply cold chains, it highlights optimizing cold chain systems, adopting sustainable refrigeration, enhancing monitoring technologies and using efficient data collection to inform decisions.

Leading scholars in **Sri Lanka** stress government responsibility for post-COVID structural changes in supply chains, recommending better input supply, procurement, digital technology, social security-like cash transfers and e-commerce to link smallholders to markets. The 2024 Conceptual Policy Framework for Food Security commits to ensuring availability, accessibility, utilization and stability (Sri Lanka, 2024). It calls for timely resilience measures against risks such as droughts, floods, transport disruptions, input shortages, economic instability and conflicts to prevent starvation. The framework guides policymakers to focus on vulnerable groups and risk mitigation, emphasizing CSA and high-tech practices to build resilience and ensure long-term food security.

The resilient supply chains narrative highlights food waste as a symptom of structural inefficiencies like poor storage, transportation and awareness, causing major spoilage in countries like **Sri Lanka** and **Indonesia**. In Indonesia, food waste is both a challenge and an opportunity to cut greenhouse gas emissions, improve economic efficiency and recover nutrients. While food loss is acknowledged by Bappenas and the National Food Security Agency, many efforts focus on changing consumption behaviour. This shifts attention from production to access, emphasizing equitable distribution, food safety and preserving high-quality food for as long as possible.

## 3.4 Deregulation

### Key arguments:

- Food insecurity is a result of market inefficiency.
- Liberalizing trade and reducing regulations will boost farmer incomes and reduce poverty.

Typically used by national governments, private sector.

**Core values:** efficiency; economic growth.

**Can be connected to:** food trade; productivist.

Deregulation narratives present food insecurity as a result of market inefficiency caused by excessive rules and regulations, arguing that these serve as barriers to food availability, affordability, income generation for producers and wider economic growth.

These narratives are typically used by national governments that adhere to neoliberalism and the private sector. In the Global North (e.g. **Europe, United Kingdom, North America**) they tend to be deployed by food industry bodies and large food companies in lobbying against the introduction of new food safety or food-related public health measures.

In **Bangladesh**, the deregulation narrative includes global trade, alongside market efficiency and economic growth. In this view, which is prominent among the government and private sector, food security is primarily understood in terms of economic access (affordability), and food insecurity is attributed to market inefficiencies. The underlying assumption is that market-led growth, brought about through trade liberalization, deregulation of markets and infrastructure improvement through public-private partnerships, will reduce poverty.

In **India**, the government's 2020 farm laws aimed to liberalize agriculture by allowing trade beyond state mandis (wholesale markets) and promoting private contracts, intending to boost efficiency, modernization and farmer incomes. Supported by leading economists and academics, the reforms sought greater market access and technology use. However, massive protests arose, with critics fearing corporate exploitation, weakened Minimum Support Prices and reduced smallholder protections. The laws were repealed after strong farmer resistance rooted in agroecology and food sovereignty, emphasizing local control, equity and sustainable farming practices over corporate dominance.

## 3.5 Food systems transformation

### Key arguments:

- Food security cannot be achieved through 'business as usual'.
- It requires fundamental, integrated overhaul of entire food system to one that is healthy, equitable and sustainable for all.

Typically used by UN agencies, academics, NGOs, some national governments, some local governments, some private sector.

**Core values:** Human rights, equity and social justice; environmental sustainability; integration.

**Similar values to:** civil food resilience; climate justice and resilience; localization and sub-national

The need for food systems transformation for food security is a **global** narrative that calls for a complete and integrated overhaul of the food system to be healthy, equitable and sustainable, and to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The adoption of the food systems approach as a conceptual and analytical tool and framework structure is often seen as a pre-requisite for food systems transformation (although in **Latin America** the food sovereignty and agroecology movements are seen as routes to food systems transformation centred on equity, cultural identity and ecological sustainability). The food systems transformation narrative has its roots in the integrated food systems approach, which was first proposed in academic works of the 1970s and 1980s but only truly began to be adopted by international organizations and pioneer governments from the 1990s. It builds on, and goes beyond, the addition of nutrition quality, access/distribution and food safety and sanitation aspects of food security. For instance, **Brazil's** National Food and Nutrition Security

System (SISAN), adopted in 2006 after two decades of civil society and government discussion, embodies the food systems approach, as does the subsequent 2010 National Food and Nutrition Policy (PNSAN) (Brasil, 2006; Brasil, 2010).

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) both demonstrates the traction and potential of this approach (it is significant that it was thus called, rather than the UN Food Security Summit) and has been a force for spreading the narrative and its underlying approach, geographically and through stakeholder sectors. By the second bi-annual stock-taking moment in 2025 (UNFSS+4), some 130 countries had articulated integrated, multisectoral National Pathways for Food System Transformation. The term "food systems transformation" has also been used by diverse stakeholders that subscribe concurrently to other dominant narratives, including, for example, World Bank, the Agroecology Fund, GAIN, the World Health Organization (WHO), WEF, CGIAR and La Via Campesina. Consequently, visions of food system transformation differ considerably.

In **Bangladesh**, the UNFSS, as well as international high profile international programmes implemented in the country (such as the Dhaka Food Agenda, led by FAO and Wageningen University) have elevated the food systems approach and led to calls for the Prime Minister's Office, the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit, and Anti-corruption watchdogs to strengthen food policy monitoring, implement land administration reforms and take anti-corruption measures. In late 2024, a dialogue held by the Ministry of Food in Dhaka, together with WFP, IFAD, FAO, GAIN and others led to a reaffirmed commitment to transformation towards sustainable, resilient, healthy and equitable food systems (WFP, 2024), and a National Pathway Document for the UNFSS as published in July 2025 (GoB, 2025).

In **India**, a pathway to food systems transformation was developed in advance of the UNFSS, and a Coalition for Food Systems Transformation in India (CoFTI) was launched under the aegis of the Food Future Foundation, with support from Wassan India, Welthungerhilfe and GIZ (Chandak et al, 2022). As of 2025, however, there is no publicly available, unified national-state-district implementation plan of the pathway nor comprehensive plan. Nonetheless, there is acknowledgement of the cross-over between food systems and climate resilience narratives, as the government of India and various environment and health NGOs (such as Dasra, World Food Programme, Forum for the Future, Tillotama Foundation) recognize that the deeply interconnected and systemic issues driving food insecurity are intensified in the era of polycrises. Recognizing that fragmented and inequitable policy landscape is ill-equipped to counter the compounding impacts of multiple, successive crises, they advocate strengthening food systems with integrated strategies that embed food security into broader resilience plans and bring resilience thinking into food and nutrition policy.

In the UK, the systems approach combats the enduring market-driven narrative and policy fragmentation. With momentum driven by civil society, academia and local governments, in

April 2025 DEFRA unveiled a National Food Strategy that was developed through participatory processes emphasizing inclusivity, equity and transparency (DEFRA, 2025). This is seen as a pivotal opportunity to reshape food policy in the context of post-Brexit governance, climate disruption and economic hardship. The strategy states that to realize food systems transformation, it will be necessary to take both a whole of government and a multistakeholder approach and to "restore pride in and build on our unique food heritage and cultures".

In the **EU**, the now-shelved Farm to Fork Strategy, which foresaw a coordinated transformation across European institutions rooted in values of fairness, sustainability and human rights, was seen as a vehicle for food systems transformation (EC, 2020), together with the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (EC, 2021a). The narrative has lost traction in Europe with the advent of the 2025 Vision for Agriculture and Food, which is more focused on production (EC, 2025).

## 3.6 Food sovereignty

### Key arguments:

- Genuine food security requires that those who produce, distribute and consume food have democratic control over their own food systems.
- Food sovereignty is a prerequisite for food security.

**Core values:** human rights, equity and social justice; environmental sustainability.

**Can be connected to:** agroecology; right to food; climate resilience and justice.

**Opposed to:** productivist; Global North responsibility.

Food sovereignty is a **global** narrative that maintains the need for people who produce, distribute and consume food to have democratic control over their own food systems, in order for there to be genuine food security. Food sovereignty defends small food producers' rights and protects land, water, seeds and forests as common goods. It opposes neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism, and emphasizes human, economic, cultural, social and political rights in support of peasant livelihoods.

Championed by La Via Campesina, the food sovereignty narrative was introduced at the 1996 World Food Summit. The movement gained prominence during the Seattle World Trade Organization protests of 1999, influencing global institutions like the FAO, the UN Decade of

Family Farming and the CSIPM. Advocacy efforts led to the 2018 UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Persons Working in Rural Areas (UN, 2018).

Worldwide, the food sovereignty movement is led by La Via Campesina, which comprises 180 local and national organizations in 81 countries in **Africa, Asia, Europe, Arab and North Africa Region** and the **Americas**. In countries of the Global South, this perspective has been associated with anti-Global North movements, especially in defence of traditional communities and their ancestral knowledge.

The food sovereignty narrative is strong in **Latin America and the Caribbean**, where Indigenous populations and small-scale producers face growing market concentration by large agricultural firms and retail chains. Key advocates include the Latin American Coordinator of RURAL Organizations (CLOC-Vía Campesina), representing 84 groups across 18 countries; **Brazil's** Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST); and the solidarity movement Ação da Cidadania, with committees nationwide. These organizations promote equity and prioritize local, regional and national markets to ensure food and nutrition security for their populations.

In some countries, food sovereignty is enshrined in national laws. **Brazil's** Law n° 11.346 (Brasil, 2006) establishes that achieving the human right to adequate food requires respecting sovereignty, giving countries primacy over decisions on food production and consumption. In **Chile**, the National Sovereignty Strategy for Food Security defines food sovereignty as protecting food rights by strengthening the national food system to ensure present and future food and nutritional security. It supports food security and commits the state to guide actions that promote a healthy food system, involving education to shift productive and cultural paradigms toward healthy eating and valuing local foods (Chile, 2023).

In **Africa**, food sovereignty has gained momentum largely through the efforts of civil society organizations and farmer movements, such as AFSA, Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) and La Via Campesina. Their vision is rooted in community control, indigenous knowledge and ecological integrity, contesting the dominance of multinational seed and input companies and CSA that sidelines agency. In Zimbabwe, food sovereignty is associated with land reform and post-colonial justice, with food access framed as a political right. The food sovereignty perspective is upheld as a way to address the root causes of hunger, environmental degradation and the need for long-term support and infrastructure investment to build resilience; by contrast, trade and aid narratives are critiqued for their failure to address these root causes.

In **India**, food sovereignty is central to agrarian struggles, highlighted by the 2020-2021 Farm Law protests that exposed the risks posed by the new laws to smallholder farmers, women, migrant workers and Indigenous communities.

In **Indonesia**, food sovereignty co-exists alongside the protectionist and productivist self-sufficiency narrative by emphasizing community agency. Non-government actors like the Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia (FSPI; Federation of Indonesian Peasant Union) advocate for food sovereignty through sustainable agriculture, agrarian reform and local economic development. The narrative emphasizes values such as community well-being, local knowledge, empowerment, dietary diversity and nutrition, aiming to build a resilient and self-sufficient food system rooted in local resources and culturally appropriate crops. Although food sovereignty appears in government laws and plans, it lacks enough influence to stop large-scale industrial agriculture initiatives, which threaten Indigenous and smallholder rights, degrade local environments and contribute to climate change.

In **Bangladesh**, an equity and social justice narrative similar to food sovereignty emphasizes local control of food production and access for marginalized groups. Grassroots organizations critique corporate dominance and structural inequalities like landlessness and gender disparities, alongside government failures such as corruption. In **Sri Lanka**, voices from civil society and academia increasingly advocate for food sovereignty, agroecology and the protection of smallholder rights as structural alternatives to both neoliberal market dependency and state-imposed technocracy. These narratives position food as a human right and a cultural good, and call for local control, policy coherence and equity in the face of climate change, economic instability and inequalities.

In the **Global North**, food sovereignty takes different forms. In the **European Union**, food sovereignty aligns with agroecology, critiquing industrial agriculture's environmental and social impacts. Its principles influenced the Farm to Fork Strategy (EC, 2020), which faced opposition from agribusiness and some governments over fears of reduced production, leading to its abandonment. The new EU 2025 Vision for Agriculture links farmer well-being and economic viability with food security, emphasizing reconnecting people to food, rural support and animal welfare. It also promotes innovation to address rising costs and climate change, aiming to keep Europe a food production leader (EC, 2025). Critics argue the true goal is protecting domestic production and facilitating trade (S&P Global, 2025).

In **Canada**, the food sovereignty narrative frames food security as a public health issue, especially in the context of climate change. Indigenous communities and civil society groups stress the need for adaptive, rights-based strategies that integrate traditional knowledge, prioritize equity and mitigate climate-related threats to nutrition and food safety.

## 3.7 Food trade

### Key arguments:

- Open markets and international trade are essential for ensuring stable and sufficient food supply across regions.
- Trade ensures sufficient food supply amid climate, conflict and economic shocks.

Typically used by World Trade Organization, World Economic Forum, national governments, private sector.

**Core values:** efficiency; economic growth.

**Can be connected to:** deregulation; productivist.

**Opposed to:** protectionist.

Global food trade is a dominant **international narrative** type promoted by institutions like the WTO and the World Economic Forum (WEF), based on the idea that trade ensures sufficient food supply amid climate change, conflict, economic shocks and shifting diets. Rooted in neoliberal values and market efficiency, these narratives emphasize trade liberalization, arguing that reducing distortions (e.g. subsidies) and removing barriers (e.g. tariffs) boost economic growth and stabilize food availability. Advocates support private sector investment in infrastructure and analysis of supply chain chokepoints to manage risk and enhance food security.

Food trade is a major narrative across the **African Continental Free Trade Area** (AfCETA), the world's largest free trade area encompassing 55 countries, boosting intra-African trade in agricultural and processed food products between countries with a comparative advantage and those with a supply shortfall. However, critics warn that this narrative could lead to over-reliance on imports to the detriment of local food systems and small holder farmers, with disproportionate benefits for large agribusinesses.

In the **United Kingdom**, the food trade narrative centres on maintaining steady food supplies and standards – especially post-Brexit, given the country's reliance on European Union (EU) imports. Food security became a key issue in Brexit negotiations, with stakeholders (including policymakers, NGOs and academics) urging avoidance of a "hard Brexit" to prevent disruption to just-in-time logistics and public access to affordable, healthy food. Some have linked the

post Brexit prerogative to integrated food systems, advocating a holistic, cross-government approach that considers public health, the environment and animal welfare, and emphasizes coordination with devolved administrations to ensure a coherent national food strategy (e.g. Lang et al, 2018).

#### FLEXIBLE PRODUCTION TO SUPPORT TRADE

Global trade narratives are closely related to productivist narratives, including CSA, to ensure availability of sufficient food supplies at all times. In the **European Union**, for instance, users of the global trade narrative propose increasing production by using fallow land (a controversial prospect that could harm to biodiversity and ecosystems) and reducing bioenergy demands to enable land to be converted back to food, as well as more flexible policies to allow for production to be stepped up in response to shocks that inhibit production elsewhere or cause distribution blockages (Zachmann et al, 2022).

Similarly in **Canada**, a global trade narrative is used to make the case for unlocking the country's potential to meet global food demand through measures to maintain production and supply, combining protection of international market access and rules-based trade with support to farmers to increase production, access labour, navigate climate challenges and ensure financial stability – as well as measures to improve processing capacity and distribution infrastructure (Blois, 2023).

## 3.8 Global North responsibility

### Key arguments:

- Wealthy Global North countries have a duty to ensure global food security.
- Global food security is vital to humanitarian goals and national security.

Typically used by national governments (but declining), aid agencies, NGOs.

**Core values:** stability; social justice; responsibility and care.

**Can be connected to:** climate resilience and justice; food trade.

**Opposed to:** food sovereignty.

Global North responsibility narratives view food security as a global challenge linked to climate change and trade systems, that requires international cooperation and diplomacy. In particular, leadership by high income countries on global food security is seen as vital to both humanitarian goals and national security, particularly amid climate change and global crises.

With core values of climate justice and international solidarity, this narrative type is supported by UN agencies and transnational NGOs, and hinges on the assumption that multilateralism can overcome national interests. It is also supported by some governments in both the Global North and the Global South, though is vulnerable to political change.

In the United States, a **Global North** responsibility narrative emerged in the **United States** from 2010. It was first articulated in President Obama's National Security Strategy (White House, 2010), marking the potential weaponization of food and climate change as potential security threats and emphasized addressing root causes to prevent conflict and crisis.

The prominence of the Global North responsibility narrative has fluctuated with each administration. The first Trump Administration undermined climate-food security links, reportedly suppressing USDA climate research (Bottemiller Evich, 2019). Biden revived the narrative, emphasizing the agriculture-climate-security nexus and launching initiatives like the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) to boost food production and soil health in Africa (USDS, 2023). However, the second Trump Administration has dismantled USAID, a move humanitarian groups warn could devastate food security and stability globally. There is no clear Trump policy on VACS.

Climate-vulnerable countries, such as **Bangladesh** and other members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, place responsibility for climate action on Global North governments, as well as on multinational institutions and corporate actors – and in particular that Northern countries will fulfil the $100B climate pledge (MOEFCC, 2022a).

## 3.9 Localization and sub-national

### Key arguments:

- Local and regional actors are better positioned to understand and address
- specific drivers of food insecurity within communities.

Typically used by local governments, NGOs / CSOs, academics, local private sector.

**Core values:** decentralization; integration

**Can be connected to:** food system transformation; civil food resilience.

In many parts of the world, local governments lead in adopting the integrated food systems approach and pursuing food systems transformation. The localization and sub-national narrative recognizes the role of sub-national actors in improving food systems by leveraging powers across public health, economic development, social welfare and environmental management. Local food strategies often focus on urban areas, identifying food insecurity causes as limited access and affordability of healthy food. In rural areas, causes include low farm incomes, depopulation, high food prices, and challenges from remote locations and transportation. This narrative highlights tailored solutions reflecting diverse urban and rural food system challenges.

The localization and sub-national narrative has been detected in **Canada** and the **United Kingdom** but is also present in the **United States** and **Europe**, where a growing number of local government areas have local and urban food strategies, charters and action plans, developed through multistakeholder processes. In the United Kingdom, the narrative is actively supported in the Welsh Government's Community Food Strategy (2025), which takes a systems approach and provides funding for place-based food partnerships. It is complemented by the National Food Strategy for England (DEFRA, 2025), which recognises that the UK food system is made up of regional and local food systems. In the United States, this narrative it is expected to become more important for safeguarding food security at a time when the federal government under President Trump is dismantling food security safeguards.

## 3.10 Nutrition and health

### Key arguments:

- Food security requires people to have access not only to sufficient calories but to affordable, safe and diverse diets that are essential for good health.
- Focus on long-term sustainability.
- Climate change and conflict can impair access to nutritious foods.

Typically used by UN agencies, some funders (e.g. Gates Foundation), some research institutes (e.g. CGIAR), private sector (agritech), some NGOs (e.g. GAIN; SUN Movement.

Core values: Human health and well-being; human rights, equity and social justice.

Can be connected to: right to food; planetary health; climate resilience and justice.

Nutrition and health narratives are based on the **global** re-framing and expansion of food security in recent years to include nutrition, accompanied by the imperative of ensuring not only sufficient quantities of food but also dietary diversity and quality. Within this type, a global **nutrition-biodiversity narrative** acknowledges that climate change and conflict can impair access to nutritious foods.

Organizations including CGIAR, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, the Gates Foundation, CIFOR, IPBES and IFPRI deploy access-based approaches including production diversification, promotion of nutrient-rich fruit and vegetable varieties, home-based food production, community gardens and access to markets.

In **low-income countries**, a nutrition security narrative has informed interventions to combat the most severe forms of malnutrition. For example, the Government of **Indonesia** launched the ambitious Nutritious Meals Program to provide nutritious meals to more than 60 million school-aged children (MUFPP, 2025). Meanwhile, the country's Food Security Agency positions crop diversification programming as supporting dietary diversity and quality to meet the energy and nutritional needs of local communities (Food Security Agency, 2020). Policy around Blue Foods includes new aquaculture infrastructure in underserved or remote regions to promote the shift towards local and traditional foods (Bappenas, 2024).

## FORTIFICATION

**Globally**, the fortification narrative addresses severe malnutrition linked to social inequalities and climate change. It is promoted by groups like the WBCSD, the Business Commission to Tackle Inequality, agritech companies (such as DSM) and NGOs (such as GAIN). These actors present fortification as a key solution to bridge micronutrient gaps and improve nutrition security. While framed as benefiting communities and governments by helping meet fortification targets, companies have clear commercial interests. The WBCSD recommends targeted strategies, including public-private partnerships, integrating fortification into policies and public awareness and developing culturally accepted, consumer-focused fortified products (WBCSD, 2025).

In **Bangladesh**, the Health Ministry, FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP), GAIN and other NGOs promote maternal and child health through micronutrient fortification, nutrition education and addressing gender disparities in nutrition access (GoB, 2025; FPMU, 2022). In **Africa**, organizations like the Scaling-up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, FAO and UNICEF implement biofortification and school feeding programmes. The fortification narrative is included in national policies such as Nigeria's NSPAN (FMH, 2021) and Kenya's Food and Nutrition Security Policy (GoK, 2017).

In **Latin America**, the nutrition-biodiversity narrative currently lacks the momentum seen elsewhere, taking a back seat to food sovereignty and systemic narratives. In Brazil, nutrition-sensitive agriculture is mostly linked to the HarvestPlus biofortification programme through the BioFORT project, implemented with Embrapa (Marques da Silva, 2017). This involves distributing biofortified seeds to family farmers via partnerships with local governments and institutions. Academic interest in this narrative is growing across disciplines like public health, rural sociology and agronomy, particularly in the context of combating obesity and responding to rising concerns over pesticide use and increased demand for organic food. However, some argue that biofortification should not be seen as silver bullet for malnutrition but may be part of a multipronged approach (e.g. Fanzo and Glass, 2018), and that it may not always align with sustainable practices or cultural acceptance, raising concerns about its long-term impact on food systems and communities (e.g. van Ginkel and Cherfas, 2023).

## FOOD SECURITY AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

In **Canada**, NGOs, academics, public health experts and civil society view food security as a public health issue beyond availability. They focus on nutrition and food safety amid climate change, which lowers crop nutrient levels, raises exposure to contaminants like heavy metals and increases food-borne risks from pathogens. Canada's Northern regions and Indigenous Peoples face the greatest impacts, leading to food sovereignty–informed responses. Strategies blend Western and Indigenous knowledge, develop adaptation plans, enhance risk

communication and public education, and address the root causes of vulnerability to build resilience and ensure safe, nutritious food access (Harper et al, 2022).

## 3.11 Planetary health

### Key arguments:

- Long-term food security is only possible if we adopt diets that are healthy for people and ecologically sustainable within planetary boundaries.

Typically used by academics, NGOs, some local governments, some national governments.

**Core values:** environmental sustainability; human rights, equity and social justice; human health and well-being.

**Connected to:** nutrition and health; climate justice and resilience.

The planetary health narrative holds that long-term food security will only be possible if humans adopt diets that are both healthy and ecologically sustainable within planetary boundaries.

The concept of sustainable diets was elaborated in 2010 by the International Scientific Symposium, Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets: United Against Hunger:

> *"Sustainable Diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets 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"* (Burlingame and Dernini, 2012).

The mainstreaming of this narrative has emerged from the 2019 publication of the study 'Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy Diets from sustainable food

systems' (Willet et al., 2019', which became a scientific reference for the food problems of the contemporary model that favours ultra-processed foods, with adherence including prominent academics, public health organizations and advocates. A 2025 update of the EAT-Lancet report (Rockström et al, 2025), which places a stronger emphasis on food justice and equity and includes new modelling on planetary boundaries, has given renewed impetus to this narrative. It also places more emphasis on the role of governments and the private sector in addressing food system challenges.

In **Brazil**, this narrative is aligned to Brazilian Ministry of Health's Food Guide, which emphasizes minimally processed foods and warns against ultra-processed products due to both health and environmental concerns (MoH, 2015). The guide is widely used in public health education and endorsed by civil society, nutritionists and smallholder farming organizations. However, food industry groups and some academics challenge the NOVA classification system of food processing, arguing that processed foods can be part of a healthy diet and questioning the framing of ultra-processed products.

### CHANGING PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

In the **European Union**, a narrative on the need to change production and consumption patterns is aligned to the planetary health approach, focusing on transforming how food is produced and consumed rather than simply increasing output. It promotes reducing animal product consumption, cutting food waste and integrating fragmented food system policies. Backed by bodies like the SCAR Food Systems Working Group, this approach emphasizes health, sustainability, equity and systemic reform (EC, 2021b). While it offers environmental and public health benefits, it could, nonetheless, negatively impact livestock sectors and small producers in developing countries who are vulnerable to changes in EU trade dynamics.

> *"To strengthen food security, the EU should not focus on producing more, but on producing and consuming differently. We need to curb our excessive consumption of animal products, which depends on feeding vast quantities of imported and domestically produced crops to livestock. This would not only reduce our dependence on imports and our environmental footprint but also improve human health through more balanced diets."* (Ruiz Mirazo, 2022).

### SAFE, DIVERSE AND NUTRITIOUS DIETS

**India's** interpretation is shaped by its traditionally plant-based diets amid a growing nutritional transition. The Eat Right India campaign was launched by the India Food Safety and Standards Authority in 2018, recasting food security as a question of safe, diverse and nutritious diets (FSSAI, 2018). Rising incomes are increasing demand for animal-source foods like dairy, eggs and poultry, while staple cereal and pulse consumption declines. The National Action Plan on Food Security and Climate Change now includes nutrition experts to support sustainable, largely plant-based diets, acknowledging the environmental impact of animal foods (MHFW, 2024). While groups like the Food and Land Use Coalition advocate for EAT-Lancet-aligned dietary shifts, others, like the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, argue against reducing already low meat intake, emphasizing its importance for nutrition (Guram, 2022). India's approach balances environmental goals with nutritional equity in a context of persistent undernutrition.

## 3.12 Productivist

### Key arguments:

- Food security through increased production, often through technological innovation and high-yield staples
- Feeding a growing population while driving economic growth.

Typically used by governments, private sector (agritech), some research institutes, large farm lobby.

**Core values:** efficiency; economic growth.

**Can be connected to:** food trade; protectionist.

**Opposed to:** agroecology; food sovereignty.

The dominant **global** narrative is productivist, promoted through a nexus of international organizations, national governments and transnational corporations. Productivist narratives stem from the Green Revolution, placing the emphasis on the availability pillar of food security through industrial agriculture, high-yield seeds, synthetic fertilizers, export and price stabilization. Productivism perpetuates concentration of corporate power in the food system and underlies inequitable power relations between the Global North and the Global South.

Global agritech companies have consolidated significant power and drive productivist narratives through lobbying, market control and influencing institutions such as WTO and World Bank. On the one hand, corporate strategies deliberately export Global North models to the Global South (e.g. Brazil's commodity-focused success is emulated in Africa). On the other hand, policy makers in the Global South actively seek these solutions due to food security pressures, historical path dependency (e.g. post-Green Revolution mindset in India) and perception of proven success. Subsidies and existing systems (such as fertilizer subsidies and public distribution systems) can serve as lock-ins, creating dependency and making transitions to other narratives (such as agroecology) risky for policy makers. Moreover, governments tend to prioritize immediate food supply and price stability offered by "quick fix" tech solutions to avoid public backlash.

Today, productivist narratives acknowledge climate change as posing a major threat to food security through decreased productivity, as well as increased risk of pest outbreaks, to be addressed through technological advancements.

## AGRITECH AND CSA

Technological innovation lies at the heart of the modern productivist narrative, aiming to produce more food with less environmental impact. It also links to climate resilience narratives by addressing climate change impacts and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Innovation is closely linked with CSA, an integrated approach promoting sustainable intensification through a wide range of practices, depending on context (FAO, n.d.). These can include, for example, agroforestry, improved irrigation, drought-resistant crops, conservation agriculture and efficient livestock management, alongside tools like precision agriculture, climate-resilient seeds, biotech-based soil regeneration and digital platforms for weather alerts and market access help optimize production and support farmers.

CSA, championed by FAO and the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture, is supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including the World Bank, CGIAR, governments, research institutes and agritech companies. The values behind these approaches include sustainability, environmental stewardship, local adaptation, equity, collaboration and informed decision-making (FAO, 2013). However, critics warn that these values may conflict with profit-driven motives, especially when sustainability is framed primarily through intensification and to promote synthetic agrochemicals and industrial monocropping (e.g. GRAIN, 2022). This raises concerns about the long-term stewardship of land and natural resources, and whether short-term technological fixes might undermine broader ecological resilience and social equity goals.

Technological innovation is often presented as benefiting farmers through partnerships with agritech companies, but many solutions remain accessible only to large-scale producers. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) claims to support smallholders, yet critics

argue it encourages debt through loans for innovations, weakening long-term resilience (Bassermann et al, 2020). AGRA president Agnes Kalibata's appointment as UN Special Envoy to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit drew controversy, seen as promoting a corporate agenda (Dehghan & Ahmed, 2022). This sparked a boycott by the CSIPM, who argued the summit lacked transparency and accountability, and threatened the rights of small-scale producers and Indigenous communities (CSIPM, 2021).

Agritech innovation is a major trend across **all regions** in this project. **Nigeria** has adopted a Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) Action Plan (FMAFS, 2023), while **Kenya** has its own CSA Strategy (MALF, 2017). In **Europe**, the technological innovation narrative is led by the Forum for the Future of Agriculture, which includes members such as Nestle, Cargill, Syngenta, Indigo Ag, Rural Investment for a Sustainable Europe (RISE) Foundation, LoginEKO, European Landowners Association and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (FFA,n.d.). In **Canada**, CSA is promoted by stakeholders like the Royal Bank of Canada, agribusiness companies and policymakers, who call for a national low-emissions agriculture plan and centralized R&D funding (Yaghi, 2023).

In **Latin America**, the productivist narrative has been aligned with national goals on economic growth and competitiveness and has driven the work of research organizations such as Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation). In **Brazil**, mainstream media campaigns have reinforced the hi-tech nature of productivism, showcasing agribusiness as a major economic driver, while ignoring or downplaying the environmental and social costs (Maderos et al, 2024). That said, there is evidence that narratives are shifting towards greater awareness of climate change: Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG) stated that COP30 in Belém in November 2025 "represents an outstanding opportunity for agribusiness to be acknowledged as part of the solution for climate challenges" (ABAG, 2025).

The Government of **India** has responded to successive climate crises by layering a CSA frame and digital service delivery tools onto the classic green-revolution narrative, through initiatives like the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), focusing on water management, soil health and climate-resilient crops (MAFW, 2018). NMSA supports biotechnology for improved productivity, drought tolerance and resource efficiency. In 2024, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research launched 109 climate-resilient seed varieties. Reactions were mixed: some feared these seeds might not aid small farmers without sufficient support, potentially worsening inequalities, while others believed they were designed to enhance smallholder resilience (Pandey, 2024; Shagun, 2023).

### INCREASED PRODUCTION FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

In lower income countries, government-led productivist narratives are driven by the definition of food security as achieving or maintaining maximum yields for self-sufficiency, with typical

values of national sovereignty and pride, alongside economic efficiency, growth and technological progress.

In **Bangladesh**, the causes of food insecurity are seen as low productivity due to outdated farming techniques and over-reliance on rice monocropping (MOA, 1999). The narrative is based on the assumption that increased yields will automatically reduce poverty. Key actors using this narrative are government agencies (Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute), international organizations (World Bank, FAO) and agribusiness firms promoting high yield varieties and mechanization.

**India** has historically been self-sufficient in food grains and is currently a net exporter, ranking third in rice globally in 2023 (FAOSTAT, 2023). This focus on food self-sufficiency continues to shape policy, especially in the face of growing environmental and economic challenges, reinforcing the government's commitment to protecting domestic agricultural markets.

In **Indonesia**, the narrative focuses on reducing reliance on imported staples like rice by boosting domestic production and promoting alternatives such as cassava, sweet potato, sago and corn. This includes shifting consumption patterns and diversifying diets.

## 3.13 Protectionist

### Key arguments:

- International trade is a threat to national food security.
- There is a need for protectionist policies that penalize imports and promote domestic production.

Typically used by national governments.

**Core values:** national sovereignty and pride; responsibility and care.

**Can be connected to:** productivist (self-sufficiency variant).

**Opposed to:** food trade.

Protectionist narratives posit international trade as a threat to national food security. They hold that domestic production must be promoted and protected from foreign competition. Food exports are regarded as prioritizing food security of other nations over the country's own citizens, while cheaper commodity imports drive down domestic farm incomes.

Protectionist narratives are used by a handful of national governments and are a source of considerable controversy.

The **United States'** farm policy has long aligned with the global trade narrative, promoting export-oriented commodities like wheat, corn, soy and industrial animal farming. The 2020 US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) reinforced this trend, replacing the 1994 North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (USTR, 2020). However, under the Trump Administration, especially by 2025, the US shifted toward an 'America First' stance, criticizing global trade rules and imposing sweeping tariffs in the belief that doing so would boost domestic production and sale of food and other goods.

Some advocacy groups warn this could cause domestic food shortages, rising prices and worsening food insecurity (e.g. Food and Water Watch, 2025). Small-scale and minority farmers are particularly vulnerable to export losses, while large industrial farms benefited most from a $28 billion bailout in 2018-19 (Carr, 2019). A global trade war initiated by the United States may increase food prices in countries dependent on US exports and lower food safety standards as companies seek cheaper imports.

Protectionist narratives are linked to productivist self-sufficiency narratives in **Indonesia**, where the priority is "producing enough rice for ourselves" rather than producing for export, and as a response to global trade instability. Anti-trade protectionism in one country or region can lead to adoption of this ideology in other places (Food Security Agency, 2020).

## 3.14 Right to food

### Key arguments:

- Access to adequate food is a fundamental and legal human right.
- Governments have a binding obligation to ensure their people are fed.

Typically used by UN, FAO. some national governments, NGOs, think tanks, anti-poverty advocacy groups.

**Core values:** human rights, equity and social justice; responsibility and care.

**Can be connected to:** food sovereignty; nutrition and health; climate resilience and justice; civil food resilience.

Right to food narratives maintain that access to adequate food is a legal entitlement of every person and an obligation of governments and international actors. Proponents also tend to acknowledge that food poverty (household food insecurity) is a facet of poverty and a consequence of government policies and economic conditions, not individual failings.

The right to food narrative has its roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) but gained prominence from the 1990s onwards, thanks to lobbying by civil society organizations and food sovereignty advocates who made a case for food to be treated not just as market good but as a fundamental right linked to dignity. In 2004, the FAO Council adopted voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food, which were revised in 2024 (FAO, 2024), and it is upheld by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Right to Food Coalition.

The right to food has become connected to the climate agenda through understanding of the unequal impacts of climate change on the world's most vulnerable, including those facing poverty and hunger. The Belém Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Human-Centered Climate Action, endorsed by 44 countries at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP30) in November 2025, introduced social protection as part of the climate resilience narrative (UNCC, 2025).

The right to food is embedded in the constitutions of several countries. **Uganda's** 1995 Constitution guarantees access to food security and other rights (Article XIV (ii)). Ecuador's 2008 Constitution explicitly ensures the right to food. **Kenya's** 2010 Constitution, Article 43(1)c, grants everyone the right to be free from hunger and have adequate, quality food. **Brazil** included the right to food in its 2010 Constitution, which guides SISAN. These legal frameworks affirm food as a fundamental human right and shape national policies to ensure food security.

**India's** National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 established the right to food as a fundamental narrative, extending beyond welfare (GoI, 2013). It guarantees food and nutritional security through a life cycle approach, providing subsidized grains to 75 percent of the rural and 50 percent of the urban population via the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). The Act mandates state responsibility for public provisioning, safety nets for vulnerable groups like pregnant women and children, and grievance redress mechanisms for accountability. In 2020 the One Nation One Ration Card Scheme made this right portable for migrant labourers (MCAFPD, 2020). In May 2022, a warm spring reduced wheat yields, prompting the government to ban wheat exports to control inflation and secure domestic stocks for food welfare programmes. This move protected vulnerable populations under the right to food mandate but disrupted global wheat markets already strained by the Ukraine war (PTI, 2022). It reflected India's focus on food as a basic right and on self-sufficiency to shield against global shocks and price volatility.

In **Sri Lanka**, meanwhile, the fall-out from the crisis caused by the ban on chemical fertilizers, as well as economic crisis and COVID-19, has led to more welfare initiatives such as cash transfers, food assistance and programmes for women and children (FAO & WFP, 2023).

### STRUCTURAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the Global North, the rights-based narrative highlights structural and economic causes of food poverty. In the **United Kingdom**, NGOs like the Child Poverty Action Group, campaigners, community groups and academics recognize that food poverty stems from government policies and economic conditions, not individual failings, and requires government action (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Goudie et al, 2025). Emergency food aid, such as food banks, does not address these root causes. Instead, solutions include reforming the benefits system, monitoring food poverty and healthy diet costs, adjusting benefits accordingly, using fiscal measures to make healthy foods affordable, encouraging retailers to promote healthy staples and urging emergency food charities to advocate for structural change to end food insecurity.

The issue of household food insecurity – also known as food poverty – has gained a lot of traction in the UK in the last 10 years, as part of issues around food access and the cost of living crisis. Campaigning by NGOs The Food Foundation, Sustain and Oxfam led to the

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2019 committing to measuring household food insecurity as part of its annual Family Resources Survey, with data used by other government departments (Sustain, 2019). The Food Foundation continues to conduct its own independent tracking in parallel.

In the **United States**, NGOs, think tanks and advocacy groups promote a narrative framing food insecurity as a systemic issue rooted in poverty, not personal failure. The 2023 Economic Research Service report links rising food insecurity to economic instability and lack of opportunity. American Indian, Black, Hispanic and multiracial households face greater structural barriers and higher food insecurity rates (Rabbitt et al, 2023). Advocates call for increased investment in anti-poverty and hunger programmes, research to support vulnerable groups, expanded food assistance and stronger partnerships to improve economic opportunities. They also stress effective communication to raise awareness and inform policy on hunger and poverty (e.g. FitzSimons, 2024).

Since the inauguration of President Trump for a second term in January 2025, this narrative undoubtedly has even less traction against the prevailing government narrative of efficiency, under which several food security programmes of the US Department of Agriculture have been reduced or eliminated – including cuts to food bank budgets, cancellation of funds to facilitate purchasing of local food for schools and food banks, and proposed cuts to SNAP.

# Annex 2: Food security narratives around the world

## 3.15 Africa

Food security discourse in Africa has undergone a major shift in recent years due to environmental crises, political agendas and vocal grassroots movements. Since the 1970s, the dominant productivist narrative has framed food insecurity primarily in terms of insufficient supply. Promoted by national governments, international donors such as the World Bank and AGRA and multinational agribusinesses, productivism has emphasized industrial agriculture, high-yield seeds, synthetic fertilizers and export-driven growth. This translated into policies such as Nigeria's Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP; FMARD, 2016) and Kenya's Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS; GoK, 2019), both of which prioritized maize and rice productivity as the basis of national food security. However, this narrative is premised on a dependency on external inputs and corporate-controlled supply chains and has tended to marginalize smallholder farmers – while failing to deliver equitable access.

The mid-2010s marked a turning point as the increasingly evident impacts of climate change and awareness of the limits of productivism led to acknowledgement of the need for climate resilience and adaptation. These new framings, promoted by actors such as FAO, the African Union (AU) and the World Bank, reoriented food security strategies towards CSA gained traction, especially in policy documents like Kenya's Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy (MALF, 2017) and Nigeria's National Climate-Smart Agriculture Action Plan (FMAFS, 2023), emphasizing ecological practices such as water conservation, crop diversification and sustainable soil management. These narratives redefined farmers as crucial actors in climate adaptation rather than passive recipients of aid, while also reinforcing the urgency of multi-stakeholder collaboration and integrated approaches to food systems.

While CSA approaches have stated values of sustainability, inclusivity and justice, civil society organizations and farmer movements have roundly criticized their ability to deliver against these ideals. Powerful counter-narratives rooted in food sovereignty and agroecology gained momentum. Groups like AFSA, Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) and La Via Campesina have championed an alternative vision of food security grounded in community control, Indigenous knowledge and ecological integrity (Sowa, 2025; Wise, 2022; PELUM Uganda, 2016). In Zimbabwe, food sovereignty has been entwined with land reform and post-colonial justice, reframing food access as a political right rather than a market commodity. These actors contest the dominance of multinational seed and input companies and the tendency of CSA to sideline local agency (Chipenda, 2018). The tensions are evident in hybrid

approaches, such as Ghana's simultaneous promotion of hybrid seed technologies and agroecological methods (MFA, 2020).

Today, the food security discourse in Africa is both diverse and polarized. While dominant actors like the African Development Bank (AfDB), FAO and the African Union Commission (AUC) continue to advocate for market liberalization, technological modernization and regional trade integration through frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), grassroots movements push for rights-based, place-based solutions. Emerging themes such as urban food insecurity, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and the right to food suggest a broadening of priorities, but power imbalances are still evident, with corporate interests often outweighing local voices.

## 3.16 Latin America

The historically dominant productivist narrative in Latin America has been heavily backed by agribusiness, state actors and global institutions like the World Bank. Often framed as a green or low-carbon economy, it promotes technological innovation, precision agriculture and bioeconomy solutions. Embrapa (the Brazilian agricultural research company) and other research institutions have played pivotal roles in developing these solutions, linking the narrative with national goals for economic growth and export competitiveness. Media campaigns like Brazil's Agro é pop ('Agro is pop') reinforced this, showcasing agribusiness as the nation's economic engine while largely ignoring environmental and social costs (Medeiros et al, 2024).

However, this dominant narrative has been steadily challenged by grassroots movements, civil society organizations and some academics that promote food sovereignty and agroecology. Anchored in decades of peasant struggle and with popular movements like La Vía Campesina and Brazil's MST, these groups argue for a radical transformation of food systems that centres equity, cultural identity and ecological sustainability. Their vision is grounded in local control over food systems, land reform and the defence of traditional knowledge against the encroachment of transnational corporations and monocultures. Agroecology is seen not only as a production model but as a means of social transformation, emphasizing biodiversity, gender equity and the solidarity economy (ABA, n.d.; CONTAG, n.d.).

At the same time, a third narrative of integrated food systems has gained traction in countries like Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica, embracing a systemic understanding of food as a human right, integrating health, sustainability and intersectoral governance. Brazil's SISAN and programmes like the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) and Food Acquisition Programme (PAA) are examples of this model (Brasil, n.d.; Brasil, 2023). Although interrupted during the populist presidency of Jair Bolsanaro from 2019 to 2022, these frameworks have

since regained strength and served as a model across the region, with technical support from FAO and other international partners.

More recent narratives, such as the planetary health narrative that underlies the EAT-Lancet report and a nutrition-biodiversity alliance, emphasize the environmental impact of diets and the need to rethink food consumption patterns alongside production systems. While globally backed by scientific institutions and public health advocates, their resonance in Latin America varies depending on alignment with local food cultures and socioeconomic realities. The planetary health narrative is particularly aligned with the Brazilian Ministry of Health's Food Guide emphasizes minimally processed foods and warns against ultra-processed products due to both health and environmental concerns, which is widely used in public health education and endorsed by civil society, nutritionists and smallholder farming organizations (MoH, 2015).

Underlying all these narratives is a shared concern about climate change, which is a major threat for food systems in the region. However, responses diverge sharply: those who adhere to new productivist narratives seek technological fixes within existing systems, while sovereignty and justice-oriented actors demand structural change.

## 3.17 South and Southeast Asia

Over the last two decades, food security narratives in South Asia have evolved from state-led productivism rooted in self-sufficiency to multiple discourses that reflect the pressures of climate change, economic instability and sociopolitical upheaval.

In India, the legacy of the Green Revolution continues to inform policy by emphasizing staple grain production and centralized welfare mechanisms, like the Public Distribution System. However successive climate shocks have led to CSA and digital service delivery tools being layered onto the classic productivist narrative (MHFW. 2024; Pandey, 2024; Shagun, 2023). These technocratic fixes have been widely critiqued as preserving power asymmetries in favour of large agribusinesses (Birner et al, 2021; Cobby Avaria, 2024). The 2020 farm laws, billed by economists as efficiency-boosting deregulation, collided with farmers' unions' fears of corporate capture, causing one of the largest agrarian protests in India's history and revitalizing agroecology and food-sovereignty approaches centred on smallholder rights, seed diversity and local knowledge (Basu, 2021; Patil, 2021; Rahaman, 2022). The eventual repeal of the farm laws showed the power of grassroots mobilization, although the 2022 wheat-export ban underscored the state's continued willingness to prioritize domestic entitlements over global market stability (PTI, 2022). Meanwhile, the NFSA, Eat Right India campaign and the One Nation One Ration Card scheme represent evolving state efforts to frame food not only as a matter of supply, but of rights and nutrition (GOI, 2013; FSSAI, 2018; MCAFPD, 2020).

In Bangladesh, historic narratives have focused on production, rice self-sufficiency and technological intensification, codified in the National Food Policy (MFDM, 2006) and supported by actors such as the World Bank and FAO. Moreover, salinity intrusion, cyclones and flooding have helped reshape discourse since 2010. Climate-focused policies like the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP; MEF, 2009) and the National Adaptation Plan 2023–2050 (MoEFCC, 2022b) prioritize resilience, while civil society actors such as the Policy Research for Development Alternative (UBINIG) and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) advocate equity, community control and ecological practices (UBINIG, 2018; BRAC, 2019). At the same time, nutrition and health narratives are evident in policy documents, but with a definition shift that also embraces food safety. For example, Bangladesh's 2018 National Agriculture Policy prioritizes safe, nutritious and market-driven agriculture (MoA, 2018). Since the UNFSS, the food systems transformation narrative has gained traction in Bangladesh, with the publication of the country's National Pathway document in July 2025 (GoB, 2025).

Sri Lanka presents a unique cautionary tale. The abrupt ban on chemical fertilizers in 2021 under the National Policy Framework Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour was a critical rupture in the dominant modernization narrative. The move led to a collapse in yields and public trust; international organizations like the World Food Programme and FAO stepped in with nutritional and emergency aid, while local academics and civil society actors reframed food security as a question of sovereignty, participation and structural reform (FAO, 2023b). Unlike India and Bangladesh, where right to food (welfare) and productivist paradigms are actively layered with new agendas, the dramatic crisis in Sri Lanka has led to a diversification of discourses in a context of national crisis. New narratives have increasingly emphasized food as a human right, supported by cash transfers and targeted interventions for vulnerable populations, including women and children, in the wake of intersecting economic and health crises (FAO, 2023b; Esham et al., 2018).

Other narratives detected in Sri Lanka concern climate – in particular the slogan "food security means water security", which highlights a specific regional framing in Sri Lanka where water availability is critical due to climate variability. Resilience narratives are also applied in Sri Lanka, with "resilient food systems" mentioned in the National Policy on Climate Change 2023, adding a practical example of how resilience narratives are applied in Sri Lanka (MoE, 2023).

In all three countries, tensions persist between centralized, efficiency-driven strategies and demands for justice, equity and local autonomy in food systems. However, despite the shared challenges of climate change, market vulnerability and nutrition insecurity, the responses across the three South Asian countries diverge in important ways. India retains a strong state-centric model tempered by civil mobilization and polycentric experimentation, as seen in its

promotion of climate-resilient millets during the International Year of Millets (2023). Bangladesh straddles a dual path of alignment with international frameworks, such as the UNFSS and the Green Climate Fund, while also confronting domestic critiques of export-led shrimp farming and seed monopolies. Sri Lanka, meanwhile, has become a case study in the consequences of poorly implemented reform, catalyzing a more grassroots-driven reimagining of food futures.

Indonesia, while geographically and culturally distinct, shares several thematic resonances with South Asia. The country's dominant food narrative remains anchored in state-led self-sufficiency, particularly through the controversial Food Estate programme promoted under the 2012 Food Law and the leadership of President Joko Widodo (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2023; WAHLI, 2025). However, climate extremes and the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have given rise to counter-narratives centred on Indigenous rights, agroecology and local knowledge. Civil society actors like the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) and the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) have played key roles in amplifying these perspectives (WAHLI, 2025), though they remain peripheral to formal policy frameworks. The National Medium-Term Development Plan 2025–2029 now includes stronger references to sustainable agriculture, inclusivity and resilience (GoI, 2025). Efforts to mainstream these values, however, face obstacles from entrenched bureaucratic and corporate interests.

## 3.18 North America

### 3.18.1 United States

The discourse on food security in the United States has been buffeted by shifting political priorities, global crises and widening recognition of systemic inequities. In the early 2010s, under President Obama, food security began to be framed as a matter of national security, with climate change acknowledged for the first time as a legitimate threat (White House, 2010). This period marked the rise of a narrative that emphasizes US leadership in global humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. The Obama-era policies such as the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and SNAP expansion reflected simultaneous domestic social concern.

However, President Trump's first term disrupted this trajectory, rolling back regulatory and food assistance frameworks while undermining climate science. In response, Biden's presidency saw a renewed push for transformative approaches, integrating food system resilience with climate action, equity and innovation, exemplified by initiatives like the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health and the VACS programme that sought to build a resilient food system grounded in diverse, nutritious and climate adapted crops (USDA, 2023; Guardia, 2022). The return of Trump in 2025 has reignited austerity, deregulatory and protectionist measures, including proposed cuts to Meals on Wheels and SNAP, and has laid

waste to the narrative that the US has a responsibility for global food security through the dismantling of USAID, as well as the introduction of tariffs on non-US goods.

Parallel to these federal shifts, a more diverse and contested set of food security narratives has emerged from civil society, academia and local actors. The dominant productivist logic of climate-smart agriculture, championed by agribusiness and technology firms, now coexists – and often conflicts – with equity-driven narratives. Grassroots and advocacy-led perspectives critique systemic racism, economic exclusion and industrial agriculture's hidden costs, advocating instead for community resilience, food sovereignty and just transitions.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a pivotal moment in US food security narratives, surfacing racial disparities in food access and catalyzing broader calls for food system transformation and true-cost accounting. These latter narratives, supported by actors like the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and the Rockefeller Foundation, aim to reorient food policy toward health, sustainability and justice (Rockefeller Foundation, 2021). However, there are tensions between global versus domestic priorities, technocratic versus systemic solutions and market-led versus rights-based paradigms.

### 3.18.2 Canada

Canada's food security discourse has evolved from a largely welfare- and aid-based framing to a more complex, multi-narrative conversation that incorporates justice, climate change and Indigenous sovereignty. The foundational Canada Action Plan for Food Security (1998) reflected early concern for both domestic and international hunger, situating food security within human rights and environmental sustainability frameworks (Canada, 1998). However, there were gaps between national rhetoric and on-the-ground realities, particularly for Indigenous and Northern communities. More recently climate-induced disasters, COVID-19 supply chain disruptions and economic inequality have reinvigorated calls for structural reform. Narratives emphasizing social and environmental justice, championed by CIDA, IDRC and various NGOs, have regained traction, arguing that food insecurity is not merely about supply or logistics but about poverty, marginalization and systemic power imbalances (CIDA, 2009; IDRC, 2023).

Since 2015, new tensions have emerged. Technocratic and growth-oriented narratives, promoted by actors such as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Royal Bank of Canada, stress Canada's role as a global food exporter, advocating innovation in climate-smart agriculture, low-emissions technology and resilient supply chains. This global trade narrative emphasizes production efficiency, infrastructure investment and market stability (Yaghi, 2023).

The global trade narrative tends to clash with community-led and rights-based narratives centred on reconciliation, food sovereignty and ecological governance. These latter narratives,

advanced by groups like Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and CARE Canada, call for deeper commitments to Indigenous self-determination, equity and localized food systems (ITK, 2021; CARE, 2016). Case studies such as the Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy and Toronto's local food initiatives underscore the importance of regionally grounded approaches that highlight health, sustainability and community control (ITK, 2021; Etingoff et al, 2015).

# 3.19 Europe

## 3.19.1 European Union

Over the past decade, the European Union's food security discourse has evolved from a focus on agricultural productivity to a more complex and contested space that balances environmental sustainability, economic resilience and social justice. Initially anchored in the Farm to Fork Strategy (EC, 2020), a core component of the European Green Deal which aimed to transform EU food systems through a just transition, the EU framed food security not merely as a matter of supply but as a systemic issue tied to climate change, health and equity. This narrative gained momentum following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which exposed supply chain vulnerabilities and geopolitical dependencies.

However, the Farm to Fork Strategy faced significant opposition, particularly from farmers who argued that its ambitious environmental targets, such as halving pesticide use by 2030, were unrealistic and threatened their livelihoods. Mass protests erupted across Europe in 2023 and 2024, with farmers blocking roads and demonstrating against what they perceived as overregulation and unfair competition. In response, the European Commission withdrew key legislative proposals designed to achieve the goals of the Farm to Fork Strategy, including the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (EC, 2022a), and postponed the Sustainable Food Systems Law (EC, 2022b).

Consequently, the Commission's 2025 Vision for Agriculture and Food (EC, 2025) recalibrated priorities, emphasizing food self-sufficiency and economic viability while downplaying earlier sustainability ambitions. This shift revealed tensions between long-term transformation and short-term stability. Competing narratives continue to reshape the policy landscape: agribusiness and farmer lobbies promote innovation and efficiency to ensure food availability and competitiveness, while civil society coalitions and environmental NGOs advocate for a rights-based approach centred on food sovereignty and ecological limits.

These evolving narratives reflect deeper power dynamics between centralized policy and grassroots governance, productivist legacies and environmental constraints, and economic competitiveness and social justice.

### 3.19.2 United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's food security discourse has undergone transformation due to shifting political landscapes and successive crises. In the early 2010s, the dominant narrative prioritized maintaining a stable, affordable food supply through international trade, a logic reinforced by the UK's integration with the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and just-in-time logistics. On the domestic front, austerity measures under the Conservative-led coalition government from 2010-2015 led to rising household food insecurity (more commonly known as food poverty in the UK) (Jenkins et al, 2021). Anti-poverty campaigners, academics and NGOs advocated preventative upstream policies and an easing of the austerity agenda.

The Brexit referendum in 2016 marked a rupture. Food security was recast as a national sovereignty issue, drawing attention to the UK's heavy reliance on imports and the vulnerability of its supply chains. Policymakers and NGOs alike raised alarms about disruptions, lowered standards in new trade deals, and the erosion of public trust in food governance (Lang et al, 2018). These concerns were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and a concurrent cost-of-living crisis, both of which exposed the fragility of food access for low-income households and catalyzed a broader reframing of food security as a civil and structural issue, not merely a supply-side challenge. In 2021, DEFRA revived the United Kingdom Food Security Report, previously published in 2009 (DEFRA, 2021); a subsequent report was published in 2024 (DEFRA, 2024).

In response, a more holistic systems approach has gained traction. In Scotland, the integrated national Good Food Nation Plan was presented to Parliament in summer 2025 (Scottish Government, 2024); in Wales, the Welsh Government's Community Food Strategy (Food & Drink Wales, 2025) takes a place-based, systems approach; In Northern Ireland, the Food Strategy Framework was published by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in November 2024 (DAERA, 2024). In England, the 2021 independent National Food Strategy: 'The Plan' made a series of recommendations to government and promoted an integrated vision linking food, health, environment and equity (Dimbleby, 2021). The Plan was well-received by academics, civil society organizations and advocacy groups, but the Food Strategy issued by the Conservative government the following year roundly criticized by as unambitious and was not backed up by primary legislation. In 2025, under the Labour government, a UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system, was published (DEFRA, 2025). This strategy was developed with input from leading figures in the food system (some of whom advised on the 2021 independent National Food Strategy), taking a participatory approach. The strategy includes measures on access and accessibility of healthy food, maintaining food security through resilience to climate shocks and geopolitical changes, reducing the impact of food and farming on nature and promoting growth in the food manufacturing sector.

Alongside this, climate change has elevated resilience as a central concern. Food security is now often framed in terms of adaptability to extreme weather, geopolitical shocks and energy instability. DEFRA's evolving definitions and the UK Food Security Reports increasingly incorporate metrics such as sustainability, utilization and agency. Anti-poverty activists continue to advocate for policy responses to food poverty. Simultaneously, a more radical narrative of civil food resilience has emerged, arguing that preparedness must be democratized and embedded at community levels (Lang et al, 2025).