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Rethinking Food Policy: A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice

Brief 4: Embedding food in all policies

Food: an opportunity to tackle multiple policy challenges

This Brief describes and exemplifies a Food in All Policies (FiAP) approach to food systems challenges and shows that food has the potential to help achieve goals in a wide range of policy areas.

Taking action on food can improve nutrition, diet-related health and environmental sustainability. At the same time, food provides opportunities to enhance education, social inclusion, community cohesion, livelihoods and equitable economic development.

For food to fulfil this potential, it needs to be embedded in the delivery of policies and actions across sectors: this is Food in All Policies.

Taking an integrated, Food in All Policies approach reinforces the opportunity for food to help tackle some of the biggest health, environmental, economic, social and political challenges of our time.

It also involves a change in the way food policy is made, by supporting more integrated thinking, creating new links between different policy areas, or creating new structures to formalise collaboration between stakeholders.

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What is Food in All Policies?

A new way of thinking about joining up food policy, which explicitly recognises food's role in tackling multiple policy challenges.

The term Food in All Policies is a new way to describe a type of integrated food policy focusing on how food can help meet policy goals across sectors. It involves embedding food in the development and delivery of policies in a range of areas to tackle a wide range of problems.

Food in All Policies can be used to tackle problems in two ways. First, to help a sector deliver its own goals more effectively (for example, delivering health policy goals through designing policies to improve diets). Second, to enable improvements in the food system through sectors which historically have not taken food into consideration (for example, bringing food into urban planning to achieve health goals).

Food in All Policies can thus be defined as **embedding food across sectors to deliver a wide range of policy goals, by engaging with a broad range of policymakers to highlight how food is fundamental to achieving their aims, or how their policies are fundamental to achieving food-related goals.**

FiAP builds on approaches taken in other areas, the most obvious being health. The Box (right) shows how similar approaches have been taken to environmental sustainability and gender issues, which offer useful insights for those working in food (see p. 7). But the case of food is also different: food is not an end in itself, but a means of improving a wide range of outcomes, and factoring food in has the potential to tackle several issues simultaneously, such as health and environmental protection.¹

Inspirations for a Food in All Policies approach

Health in all policies

- Facilitates action in sectors where health not a primary consideration
- Involves taking account of health implications of decisions, seeking synergies and avoiding negative impacts
- Provides foundation for policymakers from health sector to work with those in other government sectors²

Nutrition-sensitive programmes

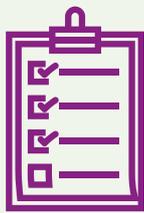
- Addresses underlying determinants of determinants of nutrition and development through interventions or programmes in different sectors, such as agriculture; social safety nets; early child development; women's empowerment; water, sanitation and hygiene³

Environmental policy integration

- Includes environmental concerns in decision-making processes and outputs in environmentally relevant policy domains
- Attributes "principled priority" to environmental objectives and screens new policies through instruments such as Strategic Environmental Assessment and policy appraisal⁴

Mainstreaming

- Incorporates gender perspective into all public policies to counter gender bias and produce gender equality in politics and society⁵

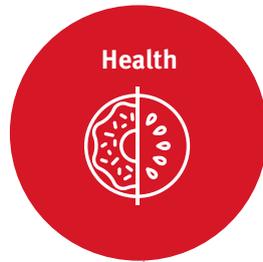


“**Food in All Policies entails embedding food across sectors to deliver a wide range of policy goals. It entails engagement with a broad range of policymakers to highlight how food is fundamental to achieving their aims, or how their policies are fundamental to achieving food-related goals.**”

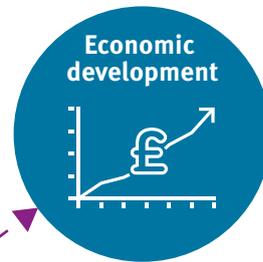
Figure 1 focuses on one dimension of FiAP - how food can be used as a lever help deliver other sectoral policy goals. It does not address the need for other policy sectors to enable change in the food system. The figure provides some examples of where addressing food can bring benefits to support a specific policy domain. Taking a FiAP approach also offers the potential to produce 'co-benefits' for multiple policy domains. For example, food can be an important focus for tourism, which can bring both economic and cultural and other social benefits. An important caveat is that while food 'can' achieve other policy goals, simply increasing the focus on food is not enough. For FiAP to positively contribute to tackle health, environmental, social and political challenges, the focus must be on good food, which supports a healthy, sustainable and equitable food system. For example, increased attention to food as a tool for economic development may have unintended negative consequences for other policy goals, if it leads to the production and consumption of unhealthy foods, made in an environmentally degrading and socially unfair way.

How can food support policy goals across sectors?

- Supporting domestic security including resilience to shocks, through food security
- Improving international security through supporting developing countries



- Improving diets to reduce NCDs, including obesity
- Reducing costs to the health system from diet-related disease
- Improving mental health through activities such as food-growing



- Contributing to the economy
- Providing a source of exports and foreign investment
- Creating jobs
- Supporting regeneration and improving business diversity
- Offering a focus for innovation and stream of new start-ups



- Tackling climate change through more sustainable production and consumption
- Increasing biodiversity through food growing



- Making learning more effective through improved nutrition
- Supporting learning across the curriculum, through activities such as food growing and cooking
- Providing a focus for apprenticeships and other skills training



- Celebrating cultural diversity and heritage
- Improving community links through food-related events and activities

Food in All Policies in practice

Food in All Policies has already gained considerable traction at local level (even if that label is not always used) and food policy groups in many cities have embedded food into the mindsets, structures and strategies of local government.

The US city of Baltimore is a FiAP pioneer. It works with government agencies throughout the city, through the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI), an intergovernmental collaboration between the Baltimore City Department of Planning, Health Department, Office of Sustainability and Baltimore Development Corporation. The BFPI is an umbrella body for all food-related projects, policies and partnerships within the municipal government, and it identifies and supports the food policy work of all municipal government agencies. Many of its activities are focused on improving access to healthy food.⁶

In Canada, the Toronto Food Policy Council has spent almost three decades “animating, supporting, facilitating, connecting, educating, advocating for, championing and celebrating” food, and building cooperation across the many departments in the city with a relevance to food. It has done this by contributing to a range of policies, from the Toronto Environmental Plan to the Toronto Food and Hunger Action Plan.⁷

In the UK, the Sustainable Food Cities network embodies a system through which cities, towns and boroughs approach challenges through the lens of good food. Founded in 2011, it consists of over sixty local, cross-sector food partnerships (public, private and third sector organisations together with local communities) representing cities and towns across the country. An example of its FiAP approach is offering public health policymakers and professionals support to create a “place-based systems approach to healthy and sustainable food”.⁸

In 2018, the team behind the mayor’s London Food Strategy set out to build on the Sustainable Food Cities approach and embed food across the city government’s suite of strategies. As a case study – which draws on a desk analysis of policy documents and anonymised interviews with those involved in the process – it provides interesting insights for developing FiAP elsewhere.

The London Food Strategy 2018

The London Food Strategy (LFS) aims to “ensure all Londoners have access to healthy and sustainable food” and to embed this policy across the full range of mayoral strategies to highlight how food “connects everything we do as a society: it affects the environment, it drives our economy, affects our health and it is a central part of our cultural life”.⁹ It is one of many policies created by a new mayor of the London government, the Greater London Authority (GLA).

The development of the London Food Strategy built on a previous food strategy from 2006. The strategy was initiated in 2016 by the new mayor, Sadiq Khan, whose election manifesto promised to tackle food poverty, child obesity and unhealthy food environments. Because of the previous 2006 strategy, a Food Policy Team, a small group of permanent staff, was already in place (see Box, right). When Khan entered office, this team briefed him on how food aligned with his political priorities on social inclusion and economic equality. He then commissioned a new food strategy. His foreword to the 2018 LFS notes that food is “a key part of my social fairness and economic equality agenda as it affects the health, happiness and prosperity of us all”.¹⁰

How the strategy was created

The first step taken by the Food Policy Team¹¹ was to appoint, through an open application process, a new London Food Board¹² – a board of advisors from business, civil society and academia, with expertise in issues from public health to the food business. The Food Board’s sub-group, the Boroughs Food Group, made up of representatives of Greater London local authorities, public health bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations, also played an important role¹³ (see Box, right).

Along with regular Food Board meetings, four workshops were run with board members to create a vision for the strategy and a definition of good food¹⁴ and to develop the strategy’s structure. The Food Policy Team drafted the strategy and board members commented on drafts. Thereafter, successive drafts were sent to the mayor’s office for their comments. This was followed by an eight-week public consultation (May–June 2018), which encompassed a traditional call for views, plus an online forum¹⁵ for members of the public to comment (800 comments received), a survey (1,500 responses) and four focus groups (thirty participants in total). Officers from the GLA’s food policy team also attended a total of nineteen events or meetings during the consultation period to present and discuss the draft strategy.¹⁶

Supportive London Food Governance structures



The governance structures supporting mayoral food policy in London are:

- The Greater London Authority’s Food Policy Team, a permanent team of staff working on food;
- The London Food Board, which advises the mayor on food priorities for London. Members are food experts drawn from across business, academia and the third sector;
- The London Food Board’s London Boroughs Sub-group, consisting of representatives of the London boroughs (primarily from public health).

The way these three tie together very closely is seen as an important facilitator of a food-focused approach. On-the-ground knowledge from the boroughs sub-group is particularly important, and many of the GLA’s explicit actions on food, including the proposed ban on advertising on Transport for London and the Healthy Catering Commitment programme, were ideas fed through from this group.

As well as these three structures, the development of the mayor’s London Food Strategy was supported by a Food Strategy Working Group and by connections built up by the Food Policy Team over the past fifteen years.

The strategy also involved the mayor’s own team of civil servants, which contributed to drafting, and a Strategy Coordination Working Group, with representatives of all the different strategies and visions being prepared by the mayor.

FiAP – why and how?

The Food Policy Team intended from the start to explicitly integrate food across the whole GLA because “food often falls between the gaps in policy terms” and so “managing to get food in other strategies, especially statutory strategies ... is helping us get food on the map”. The London boroughs had already been convinced of “the opportunity that food presents as an integrated theme” and the need for “every department to understand their role in food and why it’s important and why it’s such an opportunity”. Moreover, the Food Policy Team recognised that other policy departments often have money and staff behind them to help deliver action.

The Food Policy Team also recognised from the start that it is challenging to structure a strategy document which encompasses so many issues and policy areas. After much discussion, it was decided to divide the strategy into six “settings” – at home; the economy and eating out; in the community and public institutions; pregnancy and childhood; urban food growing; and the environment. This was done because, as put by a team member, “it really helps you define who the players are” who need to take responsibility for delivering food-related goals and then define how to deliver those goals. The result was a strategy with a range of actions to be taken by the GLA, or by external partners (with support from the GLA). These include: funding for school holiday food provision; monitoring of food poverty; food growing and the development of good food retail plans in the boroughs; and installing drinking water fountains. One of the most significant actions is the introduction of advertising restrictions for foods and non-alcoholic drinks which are high in fat, sugar and salt across the Transport for London estate.

Once the strategy was drafted, the FiAP delivery mechanism was to embed food across the other strategies being developed by the mayor, both statutory (which the mayor is required by the GLA Act to produce) and discretionary. These strategies are key to the mayoral mandate, though the mayor has relatively limited power in many of the policy areas. The strategies are listed in the Table on p. 6, along with examples of how food is incorporated in each document.

The Food Policy Team identified the mayor’s Economic Development Strategy, the Health Inequalities Strategy and the London Plan as the most appropriate to influence. The integration process was also grounded in considerable work already done raising the profile of food across the GLA over the past ten years by the Food Programme, “building relationships and making friends across this building ... and helping different teams ... to achieve their agendas” .

Along with personal connections built up over years, the GLA Strategy Coordination Group provided an important governance mechanism, which supported integration. The Food Policy Team attended every meeting of this group to advocate for food’s inclusion in other strategies.

The Table on p. 6 highlights that the Food Policy Team were more successful in embedding food within some strategies than others, with the Environment Strategy, Health Inequalities Strategy and the London Plan including the most references. Less successful were the strategies on housing, transport, skills and sport, for a range of reasons, mainly to do with timing.

Food in London's policies

	Mayoral strategy	Food-related issues which sectoral strategies included
Statutory	London Environment Strategy (May 2018) ¹⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of food growing spaces The need to reduce food waste and single-use packaging The role of drinking water refill schemes and installation of water fountains
	The London Health Inequalities Strategy (September 2018) ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food's role in health inequalities The importance of access to affordable healthy food The need to improve access to drinking water The links between homelessness and difficulty in preparing healthy food
	The London Spatial Development Strategy (known as "the London Plan") ¹⁹ (Draft 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning must seek to create a healthy food environment, by increasing the availability of healthy food and restricting unhealthy options, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tackling prevalence of food takeaways near schools and in more deprived areas compliance with the Healthier Catering Commitment standard How food growing helps to support the creation of a healthier food environment, improve social integration and community cohesion, and create a sustainable food network for the city The need for a successful, competitive and diverse retail sector, which promotes sustainable access to goods and services for all Londoners
	The Mayor's Economic Development Strategy for London (December 2018) ²⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues of food insecurity, access to healthy and affordable food The importance of jobs and growth in hospitality and food sectors The role of new forms of retail in successful town centres The important role of the city's "distinct and diverse food offering"
	Culture Strategy (December 2018) ²¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of food markets to the city's cultural wealth The role of food and drink in the city's diversity
	Transport Strategy (March 2018) ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention of food. The timing of the TFL advertising ban meant it did not feature
	Housing Strategy (May 2018) ²³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention of food
Non-statutory	The Mayor's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (May 2018) ²⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food and drink as one of the advantages of "London's amazing diversity" The need for children to grow up in households that can afford everyday essentials such as healthy food, and not rely on food banks
	Skills for London Strategy (June 2018) ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention of food (apart from in passing in relation to migration)
	Sport for all of us: The Mayor's Strategy For Sport and Physical Activity (December 2018) ²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only mentions food tangentially
Visions	Vision for a 24-hour City (July 2017) ²⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The challenge of finding somewhere that serves good food and a hot drink at 2 a.m. Food as an industry that supports the night-time economy The Night Czar and the Night Time Commission will contribute to the mayor's new London Food Strategy, and prioritise increasing availability of good, affordable food for people who work at night
	Tourism Vision for London (August 2017) ²⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That London has a distinctive and diverse retail and food offering, and rewarding food experiences The need for signposting good food offerings close to tourist hotspots
	Every Child a Healthy Weight: Ten Ambitions for London (September 2019) (not an official mayoral strategy but produced by an independent taskforce appointed by the mayor) ²⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How children should be supported to grow up eating healthily, drinking plenty of water and being physically active That the underlying causes of child obesity span systems and policy agendas, including poverty, housing, regeneration, transport, advertising and employment

Implementing FiAP

While embedding food in strategies across the GLA can be clearly demonstrated, the implications of this novel approach for implementation are not yet clear. An LFS implementation plan was created, divided into actions the mayor will take, actions he will support and those that partners will take. The Food Policy Team acknowledge that the integrated approach is an ongoing process, and for it to work, "we need to think about further integration", perhaps including "an event for those departments" to

ensure the commitments in the implementation plan that cut across other teams and agendas are carried forward. Lessons from the London case include the need for long-term relationship-building to make links and raise the status of food as a policy area; supportive governance structures which draw on a wide range of expertise; using a clearly defined vision to act as a framework for policy proposals; and drawing on the on-the-ground experience of those actually implementing policy.

Delivering Food in All Policies

Experiences addressing food at local level, and from efforts to integrate health, nutrition, the environment and gender equality across sectors, suggest the following lessons for an effective Food in All Policies approach.

1 Begin with a clear map of current policies and activities

A starting point for any attempt to embed food in other policy areas is an audit of: the local food system; food-related policies and activities currently taking place in a particular city or country; and other policies and activities with potential relevance to food. An example of a food system audit is the research study “Who feeds Bristol?”, which informed that UK city’s local food policy.³⁰ Involving those with experience on the ground – from government staff to businesses and NGOs, and also citizens themselves – can help identify where food-related changes can be made.

2 Know what the possibilities for policy change are

Any audit of current activities should be accompanied by a clear statement on what policy powers are available to make change, be it at local or national level. The capacity to enforce change can be limited when responsibilities for food are split across multiple policy levels (see Brief 3 on Integrated Food Policy). While a FiAP approach should allow the freedom to come up with innovative ideas, realism about the scope of any authority’s remit is also required.

3 ... and who will have a role to play

Few countries, or cities, provide details of which food-related policies and activities are the responsibility of which departments, so some investigative work may be needed to uncover the most relevant and influential departments, organisations and individuals.³¹

4 Prioritise outcomes and create indicators

The driving force behind any attempt to embed food in policies must be the desired outcomes. What are the most important goals in this particular context? Is it tackling obesity, or climate change, or supporting food entrepreneurship? One of the key considerations is whether any food in all policies is enough, or is the aim good food in all policies? A definition of “good” or “healthy, sustainable” food can provide the framework against which to align policy proposals. Indicators can be then be created and used to measure progress.

5 Establish a dedicated go-to food group

It makes sense that a FiAP approach benefits from a dedicated flag-bearer for food. This may be a funded team within government which becomes the go-to for any issues with a food dimension, or a food policy council (which may be based inside or outside government, or straddle both).³² A consideration is where such a group is located.

6 Bring patience and a positive framing

Embedding food takes time: integration is about more than creating a one-off strategy and relies on passion and persistence, particularly when staff in target departments can move on. Evidence from other policy integration experiences suggests that focusing on a message of “what food can do for you” will be more successful than “what you can do for food”.³³ Identifying current political priorities, and how food can support them, will improve the possibility of framing food’s contribution in the most effective way.

7 Build understanding and capacity

A key challenge for mainstreaming gender issues into other policy areas has been distinguishing between paying mere lip service to them and genuine integration of ideas. One of the responses has been dedicated training to build understanding, or “capacity”, among civil servants and politicians.³⁴ With food crossing multiple areas of policy expertise, often involving different disciplines, providing a clear, simple picture of how food-related issues relate to one another is a necessary step towards building deeper understanding. Providing on-the-ground experiences – from field trips to insights from citizens – can support this.

8 Be clear about who is accountable

Embedding food in other policy areas is about leveraging resources from different sectors to make those budgets work harder for multiple ends. This can be particularly important for food, which is likely to have fewer resources available than more high-profile policy areas such as health or planning. But the flipside of spreading policy ideas and interventions across multiple places is that accountability for them can become diffuse. Any implementation plan should clearly state which actions fall under the remit of which strategy or department.

Notes

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