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Beyond Food Security: Why India Needs a Food Systems Governance Architecture for Viksit Bharat 2047

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For decades, India's food policy has been judged by one overriding metric—whether there is enough food to feed its population. That approach helped the country overcome chronic food shortages and transformed it into one of the world's largest producers of cereals, milk, fruits and vegetables. But as India looks towards becoming a developed nation by 2047, the definition of food security itself is changing.

Today, the challenge is no longer confined to producing more food. It is about ensuring that food is nutritious, affordable, safe, environmentally sustainable and economically rewarding for everyone in the value chain—from farmers to consumers. This shift in thinking is driving efforts to create a ‘Food Systems Governance Architecture for Viksit Bharat 2047’, a blueprint that aims to bring India's fragmented food-related policies and institutions under a more coherent framework.

The concept took shape more concretely during a two-day consultative workshop in Manesar, jointly organized by Indian Council of Agricultural Research - National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (ICAR-NIAP), Consortium for Agroecological Transformations (CAT) and Food Future Foundation (FFF). The consultation aimed to constructively review and enhance the draft working paper through focused expert deliberation and collaborative consensus.

More than 25 experts representing organisations such as Agricultural Economics Research Association (AERA), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), UN World Food Programme (WFP), Gates Foundation, and GIZ deliberated on the contours of the proposed governance architecture. Rajeev Ahal, founder and convenor of CAT, facilitated the discussion process at the two-day consultative workshop.

India has no shortage of programmes addressing agriculture, nutrition, food safety, rural livelihoods, water, health and social protection. However, these initiatives often operate independently, pursuing sector-specific objectives with limited coordination.

The proposed governance architecture seeks to change that. Rather than evaluating ministries and schemes in isolation, it proposes a system where multiple institutions work towards common national outcomes. The emphasis is on making interactions between agriculture, nutrition, trade, health, environment and rural development more transparent, measurable

and accountable.

Smita Sirohi, ICAR National Professor and MS Swaminathan Chair, explained that India already possesses substantial institutional capacity, scientific expertise and public investment. The challenge is not creating new institutions but improving coherence among existing ones so they collectively deliver better food system outcomes. Narrating the background of the efforts, she said earlier, representatives of nearly 40 organisations decided to come up with a blueprint and a primary draft for discussion was prepared.

One of the key discussions centered on whether this proposed architecture could borrow lessons from the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

Pawankumar Agarwal, CEO of Food Future Foundation and former CEO FSSAI, suggested that the digital integration and inter-ministerial coordination achieved through Gati Shakti could offer valuable insights. Shared data platforms, integrated planning and regular cross-ministerial reviews could similarly improve decision-making across the food system.

However, participants acknowledged that food systems are considerably more complex than infrastructure planning. They encompass farmer livelihoods, consumer health, market behaviour, climate resilience, nutrition, trade, biodiversity and environmental sustainability. Consequently, governance must extend well beyond physical infrastructure to address policy coherence across multiple sectors.

Meekha Paul, Director of GIZ, added another important dimension by asking how such coordination would include stakeholders beyond government, particularly private companies, civil society organisations, farmer groups and development agencies.

One recurring theme throughout the consultation was the need to bridge the "missing middle" between production and consumption.

Dr P K Joshi, President, President of the Agricultural Economics Research Association (AERA), pointed out that between producer and consumer there are eight middlemen without doing any value addition. As a result, consumers pay high and farmers get less.

India has invested heavily in increasing agricultural production, while consumer welfare receives significant attention through food distribution programmes. Yet the intermediate stages—aggregation, storage, processing, logistics, value addition and market linkages—often receive fragmented policy attention.

Bhuvaneshwari Balasubramaniam, Country Director for India at GAIN, argued that identifying measurable indicators would be critical to assessing progress. More importantly, she questioned who would take responsibility for strengthening this "missing middle," where significant losses in nutrition, value and farmer income often occur.

For agribusinesses, this represents perhaps the greatest opportunity. Investments in efficient supply chains, cold-chain infrastructure, food processing, digital traceability and nutrition-sensitive value chains can simultaneously improve farmer incomes, reduce waste and enhance consumer access to healthier food.

The consultation also reflected on India's agricultural transformation over the past six decades.

Shirish Joshi, Co-founder of CAT, observed that the Green Revolution demonstrated how coordinated institutional action could solve a national crisis. It successfully integrated research, extension, procurement, credit and public policy around a common objective—food grain self-sufficiency.

However, today's challenges are fundamentally different.

India now faces climate change, groundwater depletion, declining soil health, nutritional deficiencies, biodiversity loss and changing consumer preferences. The objectives that guided policy in the 1960s cannot adequately address the demands of the coming decades.

Participants agreed that future governance must integrate producers and consumers while balancing productivity with sustainability.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from the workshop was the consensus that food systems can no longer be evaluated solely through production figures.

Shirish Joshi emphasised that future policy must simultaneously achieve three objectives—economic viability, social equity and ecological sustainability.

Affordable food, remunerative prices for farmers, efficient markets, environmental conservation and inclusive development should reinforce rather than undermine one another.

Dr P K Joshi, President, President of the Agricultural Economics Research Association (AERA), also highlighted changing Centre-State relations and distorted incentives structures as major governance challenges requiring institutional reform.

Food safety and nutrition emerged as non-negotiable priorities.

Participants agreed that India must move beyond calorie security towards nutrition security. Safe, healthy and diverse diets should become central objectives of agricultural policy rather than being treated as downstream health concerns. It was also suggested to move from food sufficiency to nutritional sufficiency; human centric to human and nature centric and centralized architecture to centralized and decentralized architecture.

The discussion also recognised the growing relevance of the One Health approach, which links human health, animal health and environmental health into a single framework. Such integration becomes increasingly important as food systems face climate-induced disease risks, antimicrobial resistance and emerging food safety concerns.

The draft governance framework identifies six broad outcome areas that together define a resilient food system:

- Nutrition and health
- Sustainability and natural resource management
- Livelihoods, women, youth and social inclusion
- Climate resilience
- Markets, affordability and trade
- Food safety and the One Health framework

Participants discussed measurable indicators and potential data sources for each domain, recognising that evidence-based monitoring would determine architecture's long-term success.

The proposal reflects a broader global transition in food policy following the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, which encouraged countries to redesign governance around food systems rather than individual sectors.

For India, this transition is particularly significant. Agriculture contributes substantially to livelihoods, nutrition, exports and environmental stewardship. Decisions on cropping patterns influence groundwater. Procurement policies affect dietary diversity. Food processing impacts nutrition and employment. Climate policy shapes farm resilience.

Treating these issues independently is becoming increasingly difficult.

Food systems governance architecture therefore represents not merely another policy document but an attempt to establish an integrated governance framework capable of aligning agriculture, nutrition, environment, trade and public health towards common national goals.

As consultations continue and the draft evolves, one message has emerged clearly: achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 will require moving beyond food production to food systems. Success will depend not only on producing more food but on producing the right food, delivering it efficiently, ensuring it remains affordable and safe, sustaining natural resources and creating prosperity across the value chain.

For India's agribusiness sector, that transition presents both a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity. Businesses that can connect farmers with consumers through sustainable, nutrition-sensitive and climate-resilient value chains are likely to become central players in the country's next agricultural transformation.