

TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE DIET QUALITY AND RESILIENCE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE - SUMMARY

GAIN's proposal to implement strategy component A1 of the MoFA nutrition portfolio 2021-2026

Introduction

This proposal summarises the plan to deliver strategy A1 “Provide market-based solutions complementing nutritious food value chains that result in increased access to and consumption of affordable healthy diets by BoP consumers and their resilience to nutritional shocks” as described in the Proposed Programming for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (MoFA) Nutrition Portfolio (2021-2026)¹.

It describes how the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) will achieve positive changes in diet quality for 6 million consumers at the Base of the Pyramid (BoP) in six African countries by 2026, and builds on the concept note which GAIN shared with the MoFA on 19th June 2021. The proposed programme will be implemented from January 2022 to December 2026.

For the last nine months, GAIN has been engaged in the UN Food System Summit (FSS)² leading work on how to deliver healthier diets in a sustainable way by improving access to safe and nutritious foods for the poor. MoFA strategy A1 captures the ambition of this challenge head on and we welcome MoFA's leadership in making it a central pillar of its Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) policy. This type of integrated approach to changing diets is new and we look forward to helping to pioneer a way to use market-based approaches to eliminate malnutrition at scale.

GAIN's Programmatic Approach And Theory Of Change

Effecting positive change in poor people's diets is a huge challenge, bigger in terms of numbers of people affected, and significantly more complex than eliminating hunger.

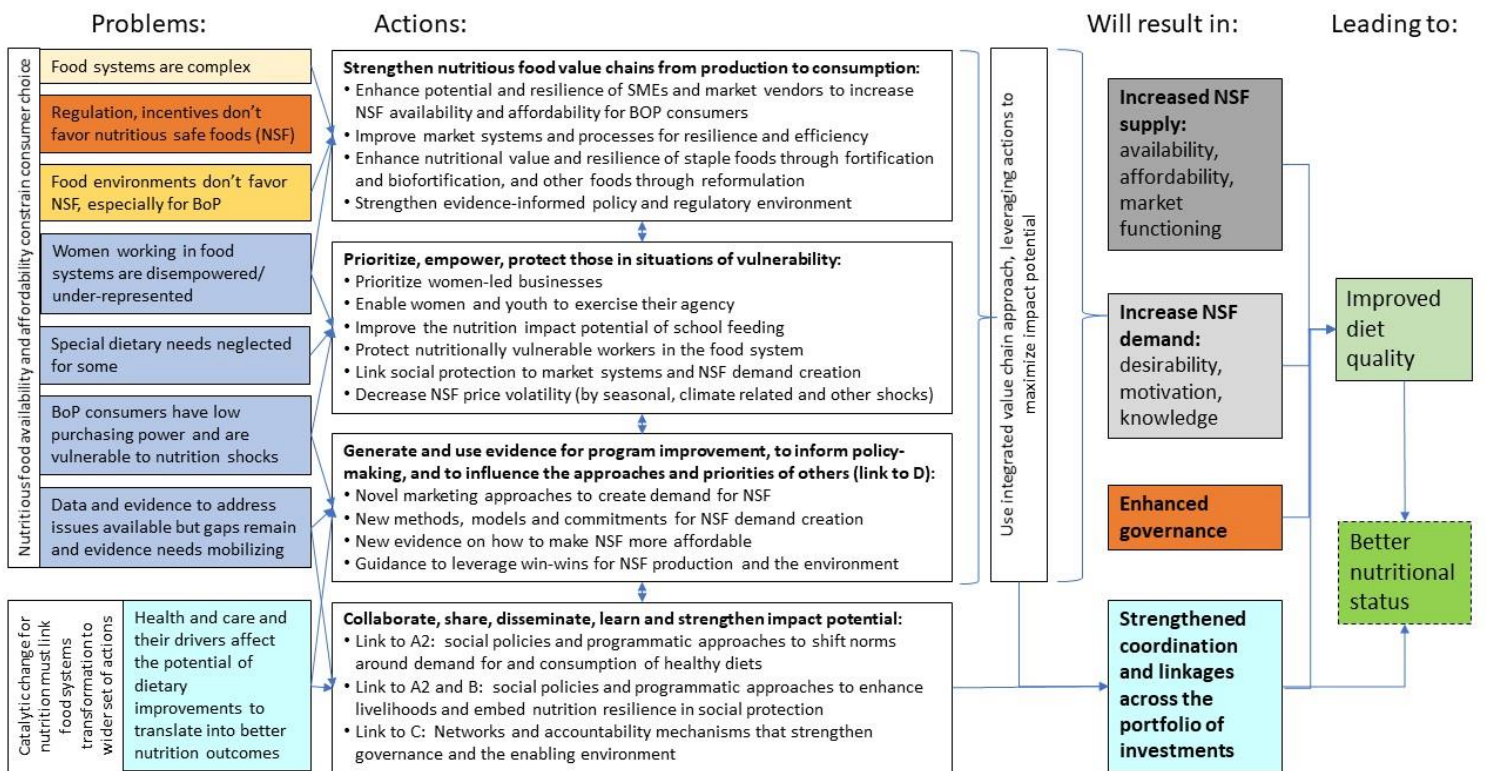
Since 2017, GAIN's strategy has aimed to improve the consumption of nutritious and safe food for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

This programme aims to reduce malnutrition through improving diet quality for 6 million people. We see the MoFA A1 Strategy as an opportunity to enable investment in food systems transformation with the parallel generation of evidence of its impact on dietary change which provides the foundation for further investments, driving a virtuous circle to improve nutrition. The evidence of impact is therefore critical to the portfolio.

GAIN's portfolio level theory of change (see **Figure 1**) works towards impact on healthy diets, with the problem statements illustrating components of the food system and linkages with non-dietary determinants of malnutrition (see **Figure 2** in annex). The actions provide high-level summaries of the types of activities that will be undertaken to address these problems, and how they will come together in prioritised geographical areas. We also illustrate how, in collaboration with MoFA and other grantees, we can catalyse nutrition impact potential by building synergies between the food systems and other investments, including in health and care.

¹ Note from MoFA/IGG/FNS nutrition team, May 2021

² Dr Lawrence Haddad (GAIN's Executive Director) leads Action Track 1 of the UN Secretary General's Food System Summit (FSS) on improving access to safe and nutritious foods



Risks and assumptions that go beyond the potential to change of this proposal: Infrastructure constrains; household poverty; opportunities and timely collaboration

Figure 1: Programmatic Theory of Change – colouring shows alignment to our adaptation of the HLPE framework shown in Figure 2 in Annex A.

Briefly, GAIN seeks to transform food systems leading to lasting changes that favour improved diet quality and ultimately, nutrition outcomes.

The BoP consumer is the central focus of the entire programme; everything we do is aimed at them as the beneficiaries, starting with their nutritional and wider context and working back throughout the food system. Country and project level theories of change will provide more contextualised statements of the problems and activities as they affect and are tailored to different sections of BoP consumers differently (rural/urban, women, youth, etc).

We have chosen the World Bank \$3.2/day poverty threshold as the most appropriate to define the BoP target group. Given the reliance of A1 on market-based mechanisms the majority of beneficiaries will be in the \$1.9-\$3.2/day bracket, but where own production/consumption is involved we will also be able to improve diets for some consumers under the lowest poverty line of \$1.9/day. In order to maximise the benefit to BoP consumers, GAIN has introduced a number of other targeting mechanisms, including: sub-national geographic targeting to poorer regions (all countries); the avoidance of the urban core of larger towns (all except Kenya); a focus on traditional markets and SMEs (both of which are the main food systems players for BoP consumers); a focus on smallholder farmers in the exceptionally rural context of Mozambique, and a focus on specific foods which, in spite of being highly nutritious, are not preferred by wealthier consumers.

Our work will focus on access and demand, adding value in relation to existing production (supply side) initiatives which we will work with where the bulk of existing investment in agriculture and food is.

We recognise the highlighting of gender and environmental sustainability as important dimensions aligning with GAIN's New Gender Programming and Environmental Strategies which are applied to the design and conduct of all of our activities, as well as shaping focused actions in these domains.

Results and evaluation

Our projects will deliver quantifiable results for MoFA outcome indicators (A.1 number of people with a more diverse adequate diet), which we will measure in rigorous evaluations. Dietary diversity of women (MDD-W) was selected as an indicator of interest to assess results, but other relevant indicators of diet quality exist (as noted in the MFA results framework). Targets have been estimated against A.1 indicators for 3 of the country programmes, committing GAIN to improving dietary adequacy (A.1) for 3,025,000 people. With targets for the remaining 3 core countries (to be defined during inception) we are aiming to achieve impact for 6 million people:

Our approach proposes to directly contribute to dietary diversity in Mozambique and Nigeria. This will be achieved by enhancing demand for and access to nutrient-dense food groups currently lacking in the diets of BoP consumers in the countries of focus. In Ethiopia and Kenya, we will improve healthy diets by also focusing on other indicators of diet quality (in addition to diet diversity) that have been recognized globally and in the targeted countries as key components of a healthy diet that require improving. Specifically, this means reaching global recommendations for fruits and vegetables in Kenya, and recommendations for dairy intake in Ethiopia. Given that these are lacking in current diets, enhancing consumption aligned with guidelines will automatically have a direct impact on diet quality. At the same time, evidence shows that when these nutrient-dense commodities are increased in the diet, the quantity of less nutrient-dense staple foods is reduced, and therefore as an indirect result, dietary diversity may also be increased. Outcomes in Benin and Uganda are to be determined.

Table 3: Main country targets

Country	BoP Population with More Diverse Adequate Diet (MoFA indicator A.1) within 5 years	Value Chain Focus	Indicators
Kenya	1.2 million BoP consumers with increased vegetable consumption towards global guidelines (approximately 25% rural)	Vegetables	Fruit and vegetable consumption aligned with recommendations Dietary diversity (household and MDD-W*)
Mozambique	1.5 million BoP consumers with improved dietary diversity (by inclusion of animal source foods)	Animal-source Foods (Eggs, poultry, fish)	Dietary diversity (household and MDD-W)
Ethiopia	325,000 BoP consumers (including children) with increased and consistent (seasonally-smoothed) consumption of dairy products.	Dairy	Dairy consumption aligned with recommendations Dietary diversity (household and MDD-W)

*Where diet diversity is an outcome, we will measure household dietary diversity (HDD) and MDD-W. Both are important. Different actions are needed if the household is not acquiring higher diversity (purchase is the issue), or if the household is but women are not consuming (intra-household distribution is the issue). We will ensure this is explicit in the results framework. As programmes are further developed, we will explore opportunities to include additional indicators, including the suite developed by the Global Diet Quality Project (of which we are co-lead).³

We also anticipate delivering results for outcome indicator A.2 (*number of people whose nutritional situation became more resilient to shocks*), in some contexts, particularly as it relates to smoothing of seasonal consumption of healthy foods.

³ Herforth AW, Wiesmann D, Martínez-Steele E, Andrade G, Monteiro CA. Introducing a Suite of Low-Burden Diet Quality Indicators That Reflect Healthy Diet Patterns at Population Level. *Curr Dev Nutr.* 2021 Jan;4(12). DOI: [10.1093/cdn/nzaa168](https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzaa168)

To provide quantitative results at outcome level, we will commission robust external impact evaluations in the 6 countries. On a periodic basis, we will also use a variety of methods (qualitative and quantitative) to assess a comprehensive range of predictors of diet quality (price, presence in market, acquisition, perceptions about food safety and affordability etc).

We will also map and monitor lower-level indicators that allow us to identify and track progress across towards outcomes. This is critical for us because: 1) it allows timely data for decision-making to adjust and course correct to maximize our potential for impact; and 2) understanding and generating evidence of these *pathways* and not just final results is central for our commitment to generate evidence and good practice models that can be used by us and others to transform food systems for nutrition.

Country Programmes

This proposed portfolio of actions will increase the access to and consumption of affordable healthy diets of consumers at the base of the pyramid (BoP) in Kenya, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda and Benin. In some contexts, it will also increase the resilience to shocks by BoP consumers that can affect their ability to consume nutritious diets regularly. GAIN will deliver this in an integrated way, using a food system lens.

In the 6 target countries, we will layer our interventions geographically, focused on key value chains, and markets that serve BoP consumers, to maximise the synergies of our actions and connect all relevant elements of the framework towards food system transformation and achievement of healthy diets. Each country is anchored by a focus value chain (or chains) which incorporates linked actions across supply, demand and policy. Our broad set of tools and approaches are brought to bear across the interventions focusing on the drivers of food system transformation and applying global and cross-country expertise and learning, aggregating knowledge, maximising synergies and building credibility and influence to address system barriers to healthy diets – within and beyond the target commodities. Additionally, we implement projects which build on our expertise and seek to tackle a specific food system challenge, or contribute to shifting drivers of food systems change at a global level.

In each of the six nominated countries, our approach is to identify nutritious food value chains, primarily animal source foods or vegetables, (a) which can be made more available and affordable, (b) focussing on food processing to make it more efficient and diversified thereby lowering the level of volatility in prices and ultimately, food access, (c) working in regions that favour markets catering to lower income consumers based on our previous experience, (d) supporting the resilience of businesses such as SMEs and market vendors where BoP consumers shop and (e) designing marketing strategies that engage and appeal to those at the base of the pyramid and will create demand for nutritious, safe food (NSF).

To achieve scale, we will work with supply chain partners who are supporting the scale-up of production, processing and distribution of the many micro- and small businesses supplying millions of people with nutritious foods. We will ensure actions are connected, so that we have an end-to-end approach to improving the consumption of nutritious, safe foods, from a demand and supply approach. This will entail aligning our work and the work of our partners, especially governments, around the key value chains and their drivers to leverage as many resources as possible for a focused transformation that improves the diets of as many people as possible. These transformative approaches will also serve as exemplars for others on how to affect food value chain transformation in the context of the UN FSS follow-up.

While this programme has a heavy learning element, it is not a pilot. We already have a substantial amount of learning, evidence and experience from our previous work, particularly in the 4 countries where we have most recently been working, to give us confidence, and in some cases foundational work for the design. It has the ambition to hit the 6m target, which is a challenging but realistic target, so the programme is contributing to upscaling, by definition. It is also a model that we plan

to document well so that it can be an exemplar for MoFA upscaling (i.e. the 32m target) and to other countries and development agencies.

In two countries, Kenya and Mozambique, our transforming food systems approach will be implemented by bringing together actions in supply, demand and enabling environment in one food category value chain (select nutritious vegetables in Kenya, and several nutritious animal-source foods in Mozambique). These efforts build on existing work with SMEs and consumers, with the aim of demonstrating a shift in consumption of nutritious foods at scale contributing to adequacy of consumption aligned with global guidance for vegetables in Kenya, and dietary diversity in Mozambique, by inclusion of animal-source foods. These programmes answer two of the biggest food systems questions challenging Africa: how to get consumers to eat more vegetables, and how to raise consumption of animal-source foods sustainably where current levels of consumption are very low.

In Ethiopia, we take a more focused approach within a single value chain (dairy), responding to specific contextual constraints that have been identified by GAIN through our on-going programmatic and research/evaluation work. In Ethiopia, our programme is newer and the political context presents working challenges for broad, integrated market-based approaches, so we will develop and test novel interventions at key entry points.

In Nigeria, we have taken a more system-based approach, focusing on distribution channels (traditional markets and institutional) for a range of nutritious foods with selected critical points for catalytic interventions which would connect and leverage other non-Dutch programmes run by GAIN and others, with a particular focus on eggs through an existing, yet minimally implemented school-feeding programme. This enables us to bring to bear a much larger set of assets from previous programmes, and also diversifies risk in a challenging setting.

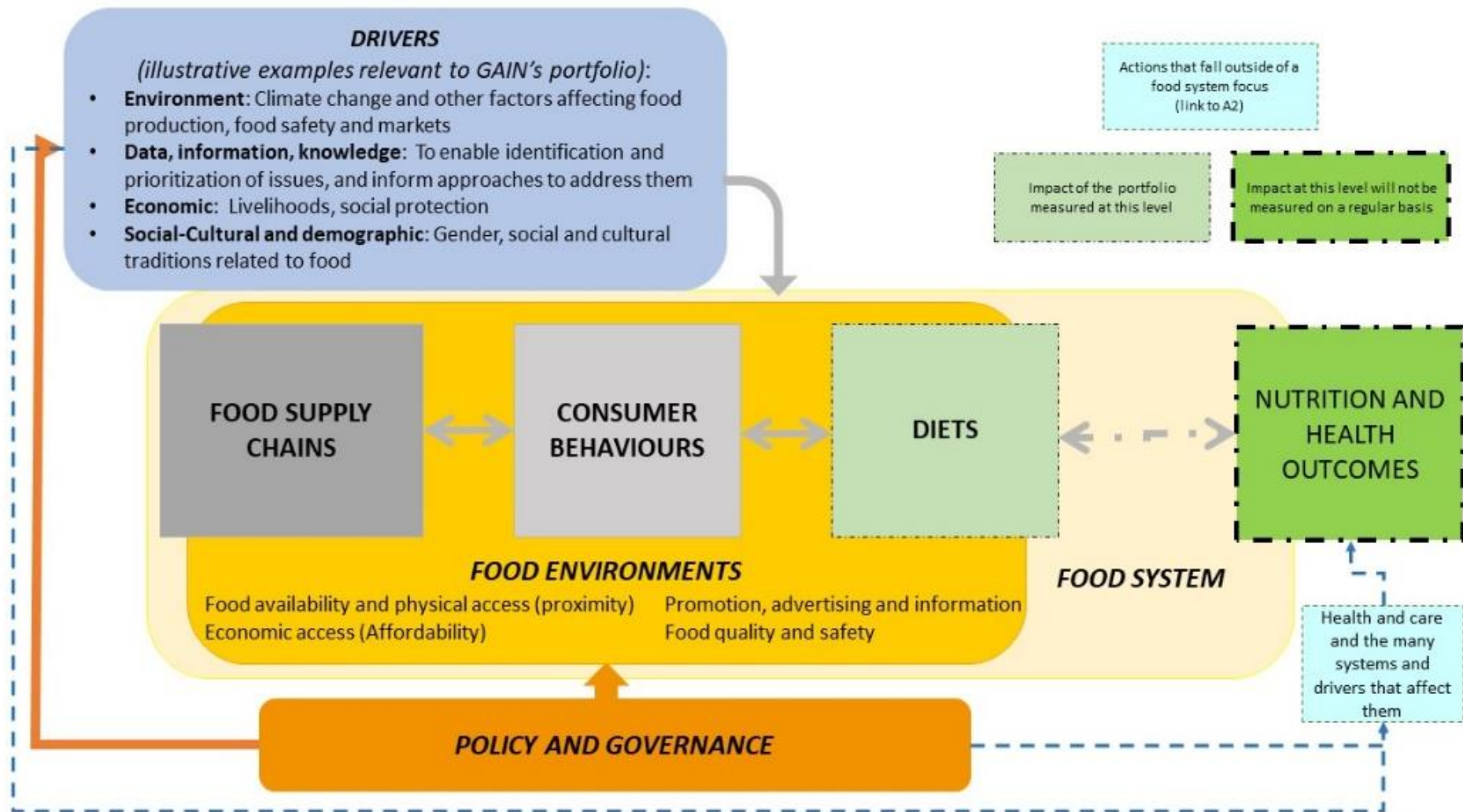
In Uganda and Benin, we will explore the potential entry points for market-based approaches to improve nutritious food consumption, combining our expertise with the priorities and commitments of the national governments and local Dutch Embassies, aligning with other interventions and partners, to identify the most promising avenues for change. In both, horticulture looks promising, incorporating a particular focus on youth, with fortification another possible and complementary channel.

All the work will prioritise high levels of coordination and joint strategy with government and with other investors (public and private). We will maintain support for policy advisers in each country to lead this work with government and will continue to support more coherent food system reforms around nutrition promoting accessibility and resilience, and help each country to draw on global best policy and practice, and that of other low- and middle income countries. This will dovetail with national follow up to the Food System Summit.

We will continue to draw on our work globally and regionally, to shape the global agendas in which these countries operate, to connect national actors to each other and to wider regional and global actions, and to test and learn from other contexts.

The programme will have a major focus on evaluation and learning around the interventions to provide hard data on outcomes, and to evolve new systems for measuring diet quality improvements in response to large market-based actions, and to explore the potential of modelling approaches to complement impact evaluation, as described above in relation to impact and outcome indicators.

Annex 1: Figure 2. Illustration of framework for GAIN’s approach to transform food systems to favour healthy diets. The framework was adapted from the High Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security’s Food Systems Framework



Based on: HLPE. 2020. *Food security and nutrition: building on a global narrative towards 2030*. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome; UNICEF. *Improving child nutrition: the achievable imperative for global progress*. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund, 2013.

Food Environments:

Our **food supply chains** activities bring together the wealth of our expertise and evidence in working with nutritious food SMEs, including through the SUN Business Network (SBN) – offering technical know-how, investment, networking and learning - to strengthen the supply chains to nutritious foods from production to retail, with a particular focus on business models to increase access to nutritious foods for the base of the pyramid. GAIN's demand generation work addresses the challenges of **consumer behaviours**, contributing to the outcome of increasing demand for nutritious, safe foods, by enhancing the desirability of nutritious foods, knowledge about them, and building connections to factors that can motivate change. Under **diets**, we will measure to what extent our programme is improving the consumption of nutritious, safe foods to ensure health diets for all people, especially the most vulnerable.

The marketing of nutritious foods pathway in the MoFA A1 strategy cuts across our food supply chain and consumer behaviours streams. We see the solution pathway 'empowerment of BoP consumers' primarily in the consumer behaviours box, while 'empowerment of agri-food private sector institutions' sits with our food supply chains work.

Policy And Governance

We recognise the need to advocate for, and build capacity of, national governments to manage the multi-sector policy and action that this framework, and the actions above, require. GAIN has built the trusted relationships necessary to take this forward with the governments in all countries where we currently work. This also includes the connection to global nutrition agendas and action and will be the way we take forward the UN FSS agenda and support Nutrition for Growth (N4G), ensuring the commitments of the Summits turn into effective action, connecting public and private sectors, where it matters most for the people who need change. This work will deliver an outcome of enhanced food system governance and relates to the rules and regulations pathway of the Ministry's strategy.

Drivers

Building on the foundational work we have done, and evidence we and others have generated over the past 10 years, we include actions that influence key drivers of food systems and their potential to change. Several of these drivers connect to health and care determinants beyond food environments. These drivers contribute to the outcomes in each of the streams above. The specific actions we prioritise:

- **Environment:** recognising the imperative to address issues of environmental sustainability and resilience in our approaches to food systems change;
- **Data, information and knowledge:** building the evidence base for action from research and evaluations; addressing the need for data on diet quality and disaggregated food systems data to support policy, planning and advocacy; generating evidence to measure and address issues of food affordability and nutrition resilience; and providing the tools and channels to connect evidence with action for innovation and accountability;
- **Economic drivers:** the contribution of workforce nutrition to healthy diets for workers in situations of vulnerability, and the extent to which social protection schemes can address economic constraints, integrate with market-based approaches and build resilience;
- **Social, cultural and demographic drivers:** especially how we address the particular needs of children and youth, and progress towards making food systems change gender transformative.