



# Enhancing Food System Governance: Decentralization, Regionalization, and Knowledge Sharing

## FoSTr Policy brief No. 7

### Key messages

- Strengthening food security governance in Jordan is crucial to ensure sustainable access to nutritious food – especially in the face of challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, high levels of food loss and waste, and regional instability. A robust governance framework can help manage food systems more effectively, address vulnerabilities, and build resilience.
- Food security has only recently gained recognition as a multidisciplinary sector in Jordan, primarily through the endorsement of the first Food Security Strategy in 2021 and the establishment of the Food Security Council (FSC) in 2023.
- The current institutional setup for food security governance is in its early stages and faces significant challenges, including overlap in roles between the Higher Agricultural Council and the FSC, insufficient authority, and limited budget allocation to the FSC.
- Ambiguity in the relationship between the Ministry of Agriculture and the FSC is leading to emerging tensions. The Ministry views the FSC as a unit within it, despite the FSC's broader mandate across sectors beyond agriculture.
- Jordan's progress in becoming a regional leader in food security has been limited due to declining momentum in regional food security efforts and cooperation, despite periodic high-level meetings and expressed political will.
- The establishment of the FSC's standing committees is a positive step towards enhancing governance and inclusivity. However, a lack of substantial representation of the private sector, civil society organizations, and governorate councils limits the breadth and impact of decision-making.
- Data integration and transparency remain critical issues, with fragmented data across agencies hindering efficient governance. Establishing a comprehensive data-sharing system, that's accessible to all stakeholders, will improve coordination and decision-making. The newly established Food Security Management Information System (FSMIS) is major step in this regard.

## Introduction

This policy brief is part of a series by the Foresight for Food Systems Transformation (FoSTr) Programme,<sup>1</sup> designed to provide stakeholders with the relevant data, information, policy tools, and recommendations that enable a collective understanding of key issues in food systems transformation. The need for these briefs was highlighted during FoSTr workshops held in May and November 2023, as well as at other significant events. Stakeholders emphasized the lack of awareness and appreciation around food systems transformation, and the need for a holistic, comprehensive approach to effectively achieve change.

The primary objective of this policy brief is to inform and enhance decisions, strategies, and plans related to important aspects of governance in food systems transformation – such as decentralization, regionalization, and knowledge creation and dissemination by and among relevant stakeholders. Moreover, it aims to enable a collective understanding of the food system. Over the past few years, Jordan has embarked on major political, institutional, and economic reforms; with food security and food systems transformation placed high in its Food Security Strategy (FSS) 2022–2030 and the Economic Modernization Vision 2023–2033.

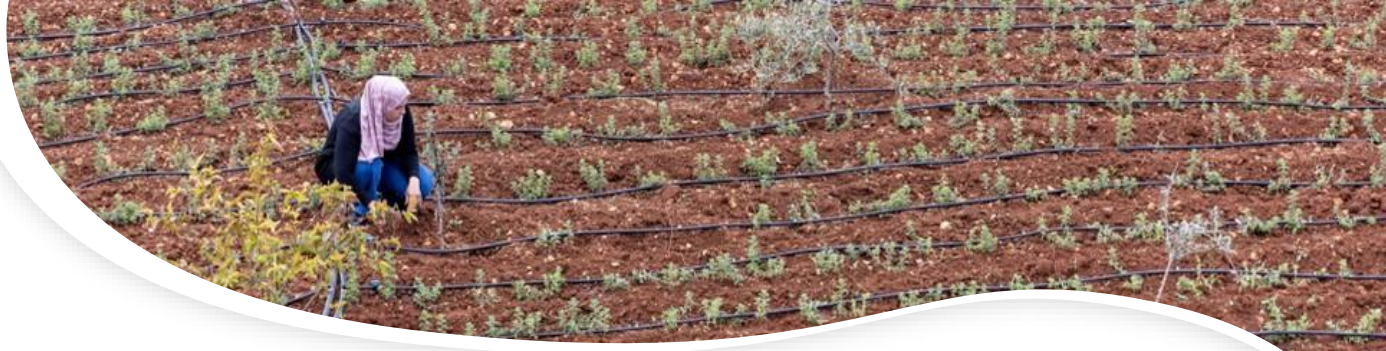
This brief seeks to answer two main research questions. First, how is the Jordanian food system governed in terms of power and practice? And, second, what policy recommendations can strengthen and reform governance in Jordan's food system?

## Research approach and methods

This brief is limited to summarizing key policy issues related to Jordan's food security governance system. Given its concise scope, the methodology was primarily consultative, including a literature review and meetings and discussions with policy and subject matter experts. Information was gathered from the Food Security Council (FSC), the Ministry of Agriculture, private sector representatives, and civil society organizations (CSOs). The first draft of the study was reviewed by FoSTr experts, then a semi-final policy brief was presented at the FoSTr workshop in November 2024 for further review and feedback.



<sup>1</sup> The FoSTr Programme covers four countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It provides Jordan with a country support facility for food systems foresight and scenario analysis. The country-led and multi-actor foresight process aims to assist stakeholders in their contributions to national food systems transformation. It also supports the dialogue, analysis, and understanding necessary for the co-creation of future food systems that are sustainable, healthy, equitable, and resilient.



## Analysis and key findings

Although the term ‘food security’ has been increasingly used in Jordan over the past few decades, as a subject or sector it has not received the attention it deserves. While some efforts had been made to develop food security strategies, it was only in 2022 that the first national FSS was endorsed – reflecting the high-level attention given to food security in the aftermath of COVID-19.

The food system is governed by several key regulators. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Supply set regulations on food production and processing. The system is also subject to central marketing rules, customs and taxes, subsidies (e.g., for bread, electricity, and fodder), and various regulatory frameworks. Influential food system players include trade and industry chambers (e.g., larger importers and processors), wholesale market management, suppliers (farmers), importers, exporters and dealers, the National Society for Consumer Protection, and various media outlets that spotlight food-related issues.<sup>2</sup> Annex 1 details the roles, interests, and concerns of actors across different levels and domains of food system governance.

The FSC and its committees, together with the Cabinet and Parliament, serve as major change agents in food systems transformation at the upstream policy and planning level. At the sectoral level, relevant line ministries oversee areas such as agriculture, health, industry, trade, supply, water, social development, and environment. In the private sector, key players include food and agriculture producers, consumers, and service providers (e.g., finance, marketing, storage, packing, and transportation), as well as operators, dealers, and traders (including wholesalers, retailers, exporters, and importers). Certain CSOs also contribute to food system governance, including universities (providing education, research, training, and advisory services), farmers and producers’ unions, consumer and trade associations, and organizations focused on reducing food loss and waste and hunger and malnutrition.

These struggles are deeply entwined with knowledge politics, gender and class dynamics, and unequal access to resources such as land, seeds, water, and funding. Participants in various projects are often depicted as striving for recognitional justice, particularly in representation, decision-making, cooperation, and collective action.<sup>3</sup>

Various institutions, organizations, and groups have distinct roles within Jordan’s food system structure, and Annex 1 summarizes the roles, expectations, and concerns of key stakeholders. Some stakeholders share common interests and objectives, while others encounter conflicts and contradictions, both within and across institution categories. However, each stakeholder has a vested interest in food security, influencing and being influenced by developments within and around the food sector.

**The establishment of the FSC<sup>4</sup> as the national coordinating body, with its four standing committees (policies and planning, food loss and waste, FSMIS, and finance), marked a significant milestone in governance of the sector.**

### Key stakeholders involved in food system governance

<sup>2</sup>Rabbob, W.A., Peters, B., Dengerink, J., de Steenhuijsen Piters, B., Fakhry, H., Barois, Z.O., Selten, M.P.H., & Nabulsi, A. (2023) *An Overview of the Jordanian Food System: Outcomes, Drivers & Activities*, Oxford: Foresight4Food. Available at: [https://foresight4food.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/an\\_overview\\_of\\_the\\_jordanian\\_food\\_system\\_outcomes-wageningen\\_university\\_and\\_research\\_640975.pdf](https://foresight4food.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/an_overview_of_the_jordanian_food_system_outcomes-wageningen_university_and_research_640975.pdf) (Accessed: day month year).

<sup>3</sup>Tschakert, P., Parsons, M., Atkins, E., Garcia, A., Godden, N., Gonda, N., Pavia Henrique, K., Sallu, S., Steen, K., and Ziervogel, G. (2023) *Methodological lessons for negotiating power, political capabilities, and resilience in research on climate change responses*, *World Development*, volume 167. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X23000657> (Accessed: day month year).

<sup>4</sup>The FSC was established within the Ministry of Agriculture, and is headed by the Minister of Agriculture. The Minister of Industry, Trade, and Supply serves as the deputy chairman, with ministers from the ministries of Planning and International Cooperation, Health, Social Development, Water, Environment, Education, and Finance serving as members alongside with other high-ranking public officials

## FSC by-law number 43 (2023) stipulates the following major objectives of the FSC:

- Review and endorse policies, strategies, and plans related to food security
- Coordinate and harmonize efforts among food security stakeholders
- Promote and strengthen cooperation with countries in the region
- Publish an annual report on the State of Food Security in Jordan
- Review regulatory and budget proposals
- Address other tasks, as assigned by the FSC.

It is worth noting that each stakeholder, through its own regulatory and budget frameworks, performs specific tasks in their area of responsibility. The FSC does not implement activities that fall within the mandate of other institutions; rather, it supports and complements these efforts.

**Jordan is in the process of delivering its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-related initiatives, including five major initiatives. One of these is on food security, and aims to reaffirm and strengthen Jordan's commitment to food systems transformation by:**



Establishing a clear division of labor and responsibilities among stakeholders, as outlined in a plan to activate the food security governance system. This covers areas such as institutional frameworks, policies and procedures, legal aspects, and human resource development;



Maximizing coordination among stakeholders throughout implementation, by leveraging capacities of the private sector, United Nations (UN) organizations, and civil society, and building public-private partnerships



Supporting government entities in outsourcing programme components to the private sector and implementing state-of-the-art technologies and management tools.



In addition, recent administrative decentralization reforms have led to the establishment of elected governorate councils, which have independent budgets. Jordan now has 12 governorate councils, composed of 381 members elected from 158 constituencies. Of these seats, 85% are elected, while 15% are appointed by the central government. Under the decentralization law, the councils hold administrative and financial independence and are tasked with endorsing budgets, strategic plans, and service and infrastructure projects. They work closely with the governorate's executive council, which comprises central government representatives, such as the governors and directors.<sup>5</sup>

Many public institutions involved in food security, such as Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, and Ministry of Water, operate branches across governorates and districts, delivering services through field offices. Moreover, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) maintain numerous field offices throughout the country.<sup>6</sup>

Public institutions and CSOs each operate within their own regulatory frameworks. For example, the National Society of Consumer Protection focuses on combating fraud, reducing inflated prices for goods and services, and preventing monopolies, to ensure consumers have access to alternative, quality goods suitable for consumption. Meanwhile, private sector organizations are regulated by frameworks which govern trade, industry, agriculture, cooperatives, health, customs, food safety, and quality assurance, among others.

<sup>5</sup>The Jordan Times (2017) 'Proposed by-law increases seats, women's quota at governorate councils', *The Jordan Times*, 18 February. Available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/proposed-law-increases-seats-women%E2%80%99s-quota-governorate-councils> (Accessed: day month year).  
<sup>6</sup>Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD)/National Alliance Against Hunger and Nutrition (NAJMAH) has 52 offices distributed across urban and rural areas, covering the entire governorates

## Major challenges facing food security governance in Jordan

Jordan's food security system faces several challenges, constraints, and bottlenecks, with some of the most important being:

01

**Weak policies, regulations, and capacities:** Inadequate or poorly enforced policies, along with a shortage of skilled staff, hinder the effective implementation and management of a comprehensive food security strategy and sustainable transformation process. Moreover, the roles of the Higher Agricultural Council (chaired by the Prime Minister) and the FSC (chaired by the Minister of Agriculture) are ambiguous and sometimes overlap; with the Higher Agricultural Council largely inactive. Furthermore, the roles of cooperatives and NGOs are very limited. Greater capacity building is needed across stakeholders to address emerging issues related to food insecurity, nutrition, and food waste.

02

**Lack of coordination:** Overlaps exist among the Ministry of Agriculture, the Jordan Food and Drug Administration, and the Jordan Standardizations and Metrology Organization in regulating different aspects of the food system. In addition, coordination between government agencies and CSOs is insufficient, particularly in addressing the needs of marginalized communities.

03

**The nascence of the FSC:** The FSC is still in its infancy and faces challenges due to inadequate staffing. Moreover, the FSC Secretariat is not directly connected to the FSC Chairman, which hinders effective governance. The FSC also operates with a limited budget, which does not reflect the sector's actual needs or political significance.

04

**Regional food security efforts are lagging:** Despite periodic, high-level ministerial meetings between Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, progress in achieving regional food security is slowing. This decline in momentum is largely due to volatile political conditions affecting relationships between neighbouring countries.

05

**Limited representation:** Governorates, vulnerable groups, the private sector, and CSOs are minimally represented on the FSC's board, its committees, and other governing bodies. This limits the influence and capacity of these groups to advocate for their interests, including those of consumers. Furthermore, power remains concentrated in the capital, with the decentralization process facing significant financial resource constraints.

06

**Fragmented food system data:** Data on various aspects of the food system – such as production, consumption, and food safety – is dispersed across multiple governmental agencies.

07

**Lack of a digital traceability system:** The Jordanian food system lacks a National Traceability System for Agricultural Products, which allows food to be traced back to the farm and ensures quality, safety, and compliance with international standards.



## Policy recommendations

The above findings and discussions led to the following recommendations for achieving food systems transformation:

- 01 Reassess the status of the Higher Agriculture Council in light of the FSC's establishment.** It is recommended to dissolve the Higher Agriculture Council to avoid overlap and simultaneously enhance the FSC's autonomy and structure. Strengthening the FSC's committees is also essential to support decision-making, partnerships, and ownership for decisions and intervention outcomes.
- 02 Strengthen the roles of CSOs and the private sector by** improving their access to services, such as concessional finance, marketing, and awareness and extension campaigns.
- 03 Prioritize data collection, research, knowledge sharing, and dissemination as** essential components of effective governance. Developing robust knowledge and data exchange mechanisms at the interface of policy and knowledge is critical, along with making data accessible to all stakeholders.
- 04 Allocate sufficient financial resources to the FSC** to support activities not covered by other institutions. Achieving the objectives of the FSS requires efforts from public institutions, private sector organizations, and CSOs. The government, donors, and UN organizations should fund these critical activities.
- 05 Enhance the roles of governorate councils, grassroots organizations, and vulnerable groups** as key contributors to improving decentralization and people's empowerment, ensuring a fair division of roles and authority. Moreover, prioritize food waste reduction in donors' agendas, as doing so provides quick wins in saving food, water, and money; protecting the environment; and job creation.

## Conclusions



Effective food security governance in Jordan is essential to achieving the goals of the FSS and the country's Food System Transformation Road Map. The newly established FSC, its standing committees, the FSMIS, and the No Food Waste Initiative are important interventions and achievements that strengthen food security governance and advance food system transformation. However, challenges and constraints remain. Implementing the recommendations provided in this brief will require the FSC and its standing committees to take active roles in planning, supervising, coordinating, and monitoring and evaluation. The government and other funders must allocate sufficient resources and empower governorate councils and other decentralized entities with appropriate authority and support.



Regional cooperation among Middle Eastern countries has also slowed, despite strong political will in the region. Knowledge sharing and the exchange of experiences, lessons learned, and success stories could serve as starting points to reinvigorate cooperation. Strengthening food security governance will not only enhance food security but also contribute to broader objectives, including poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

## Note about policy brief authors

This policy brief was written by Walid Abed Rabboh (FoSTr country facilitator) and Asem Nabulsi (FoSTr deputy country facilitator), with Nezar Samarah (Jordan University of Science and Technology), under the **Foresight for Food Systems Transformation** (FoSTr) programme. FoSTr supports Jordan with a facility for food systems foresight and scenario analysis. This country-led, multi-actor process aims to foster dialogue, analysis, and shared understanding to co-create sustainable, healthy, equitable, and resilient food systems.

## Annex 1:

# Institutional analysis of food security stakeholders

Category	Relevant tasks	Expectations and interest	Concerns and challenges
<b>Government institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing regulatory framework</li> <li>Food control and quality assurance</li> <li>Provision of services, such as extension, finance, and licensing</li> <li>Import, purchase, and storage of wheat and barley</li> <li>International cooperation and agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieve and serve government policies, strategies, and visions</li> <li>Achieve security and stability</li> <li>Enhance popularity and support</li> <li>Improve government income</li> <li>Promote exports</li> <li>Improve Jordan's role as a regional hub</li> <li>Activate the role and interest of other partners, such as the private sector and CSOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The complexity of food security</li> <li>Weak coordination among stakeholders</li> <li>Additional burdens on the budget and/or not enough financial resources made available</li> <li>Unexpected risks and uncertainties; i.e., economic, political, health, and natural</li> <li>Conflict of interest and resistance from some stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Farmers' groups and associations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Production of food commodities and by-products</li> <li>Lobbying and defending farmers' interests and causes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve income and livelihood of farmers</li> <li>Gaining stronger power and influence</li> <li>Protect local production</li> <li>Improving the competitiveness of Jordan's produce in foreign markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural and economic risks</li> <li>Negative effects on farmers</li> <li>Unfair competition in the local market</li> </ul>
<b>Private sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of services</li> <li>Production of food and inputs</li> <li>Trading and marketing</li> <li>Investment promotion</li> <li>Food processing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional and new business</li> <li>Greater regional role</li> <li>New partnerships</li> <li>Fewer distortions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent policy and regulatory changes</li> <li>Not enough protection for local production, especially new and infant industries and businesses</li> <li>New competitors entering the market</li> </ul>
<b>International, regional, and bilateral organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of technical and financial support</li> <li>Improvement of people's livelihoods</li> <li>Creating economic growth</li> <li>Support reforms in Jordan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieving peace, security, and stability in Jordan</li> <li>Sustain Jordan's role as positive contributor and example of stability in the region</li> <li>Assist Jordan in achieving SDGs and other international conventions and agreements</li> <li>Promote private sector role</li> <li>Minimize distortions and malpractices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing country debt and debt services</li> <li>Capacity of Jordan to sustain reform momentum</li> <li>Frequent changes in the leadership of counterpart institutions</li> <li>Weak capacities in counterpart institutions</li> <li>Conducting 'business as usual' by keeping support in the same sectors</li> </ul>
<b>UN organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of policy advice, technical assistance, and institutional support</li> <li>Implementation of developmental and humanitarian projects, such as social assistance, agriculture, nutrition, and health</li> <li>Assist in achieving relevant SDGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve the UN organizations' mandates</li> <li>Support Jordan's efforts in different fields</li> <li>Jordan will provide an enabling environment for UN organizations to perform properly and promptly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent changes in the leadership of counterpart institutions</li> <li>Weak capacities in counterpart institutions</li> <li>Securing proper funding</li> <li>Weak coordination among UN organizations</li> </ul>
<b>CSOs and NGOs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion/support of civil society and marginalized people's needs and demands</li> <li>Tackle poverty and food insecurity</li> <li>Defend farmers, consumers, and other stakeholders' interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fair and equitable treatment of all people</li> <li>Serve their own mandates and objectives</li> <li>Provision of improved and better services to their constituencies and beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative attitude towards civil society and NGO organizations</li> <li>Diminishing funding</li> <li>Competition with other stakeholders</li> </ul>