FOOD FORWARD NDCs

Integrate healthy and sustainable diets in public procurement

Overview

Public procurement can address food systems issues in many different ways. Public food procurement (PFP) refers to the purchase of food for public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, universities, and cafeterias in public buildings, and within other public social programmes. In schools, well-designed procurement programs, food-based safety nets and feeding programmes can support various social and environmental outcomes related to food and nutrition, as well as help build lifelong habits for healthy and sustainable eating.

Sustainable public procurement (SPP) policies target both social and environmental concerns related to food production and consumption. SPP policies may focus on one or more aspects of sustainable and healthy diets, including:

- Increasing the share of organic, plant-based and/or unprocessed foods in purchasing.
- Equitable and inclusive sourcing from social cooperatives or local and sustainable small and medium enterprise (SME) agri-food producers, implementing policies that support peasants, smallholders, family farmers, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- Providing healthy and sustainable diets to children and teenagers.
- Helping to educate youth about sustainable, equitable and healthy eating habits, as well as the environmental footprints of food systems.

Concrete measures to implement

As major purchasers of food and catering services, public authorities can play an important role in supporting sustainable food production, distribution and consumption. There are three main ways public procurement can drive healthy and sustainable diets:

- Develop a **public regulatory framework and policies** for PFP schemes to:
    - Enable the implementation of PFP schemes that favour or prioritise certain suppliers (e.g., local, smallholder farms that use sustainable practices like agroecology or climate-smart agriculture).
    - Establish **simplified rules and procedures** to facilitate contract "lotting" (i.e., where large contracts are divided into smaller, more manageable lots), making it easier for SMEs to win tenders while addressing power imbalances between large and small food providers.
    - Allow greater consideration of sustainability issues associated with food procurement (e.g., impacts on human health and the environment) rather than awarding contracts based solely on the lowest economic cost. For example, Scotland's **Procurement Reform Act** requires that all contracting authorities consider sustainability dimensions when awarding contracts.
    - Strengthen the emphasis on equitable and inclusive **sourcing of sustainable, local (especially from SMEs), seasonal and fresh products**. Prioritise sourcing food that was produced using climate resilient and agroecological farming practices.
    - Developing and adopting SPP criteria at the national and municipal level and make them mandatory for food procurement. Implement policies to support smallholders, family farmers, Indigenous Peoples, peasants, women, youth and local communities.

- Make sure that existing public procurement criteria align with ambitious climate, health and animal welfare goals for food systems:
    - Make nutritious plant-based options more commonplace on menus, thereby helping to enable a balanced diet.

- Increase the procurement of free-range and organic animal products, or require contractors to enforce stronger animal protection and animal welfare standards in meat and dairy production.
- Source food products that are handled with low environmental impact packaging throughout the supply chain.
- Ensure bulk purchases and that food stocks are carefully managed to avoid waste.
- Include full **life cycle costs** when evaluating PFP tender proposals to decrease carbon impact, by considering emissions that arise throughout the entire life cycle, including for example transportation and packaging. For more detailed information on using life cycle impact assessments for agri-food systems, see ***Assessing food system impacts***.
- Ensure that any move to low-carbon menus is made without compromising on taste or nutritional quality, which could reduce the public's acceptance of such a shift.

- Adopt and implement SPP criteria:

  - Provide training to procurement officers and caterers on sustainable sourcing and to chefs and nutritionists on sustainable diets and menu design.
  - Set quantifiable and timebound targets to keep institutions accountable and measure progress.
  - Facilitate performance monitoring and budget tracking, including digitalisation of procurement processes.
  - Establish a network of best practices to encourage innovation.
  - Encourage contractors who operate their own kitchens to use or purchase energy and water-efficient equipment.
  - Make public procurement conditional upon the adoption of food waste prevention targets by catering companies **to address food waste**. For more information on possible food waste measures, see ***Reducing food waste in gastronomy sector, retail and at household level***.
  - Encourage contractors to deliver environmental education activities to the recipient of catering services (e.g., raising awareness about food waste and low-carbon diets among schoolchildren).

- Support knowledge sharing and best practices, peer learning and innovative approaches to shifting diets in public institutions.
- Choose the appropriate **type of procurement scheme** depending on the specific context, such as:
    - Reservation schemes make certain procurement opportunities available only to suppliers who satisfy specific prescribed criteria. They have the potential to benefit family farmers, family rural entrepreneurs, local producers, vulnerable producers (such as land reform settlers and traditional communities) and organic and agroecological producers.
    - Preferential schemes use a fully competitive tender process but give preference to suppliers who meet specific criteria (e.g., qualification as local or smallholder farmers, or agroecological production). Preferential schemes potentially benefit local agricultural production.
    - In indirect schemes, the procuring entity requires the immediate contractors (e.g., caterers) to purchase food from targeted beneficiaries (e.g., family farmers).
- Implement **Environmental Management Systems** (EMSs), either directly by the public authorities who operate PFP programmes or indirectly by requiring suppliers to adopt EMSs as conditions for procurement contracts.
- Explore the potential for school gardens to supplement the availability of healthy, fresh foods while also providing educational opportunities to learn about health, environment and sustainability.

A variety of orphan crops for sale in Arusha Market, Tanzania

Enabling governance measures

Creating an enabling governance environment is essential for effectively implementing the above measures. These enabling measures can include:

- Setting **commitments** at the national level to encourage and facilitate conducive conditions for SPP at the local level (e.g., development of clear definitions, objectives and roles).
- Implementing sustainable PFP **coupled** with other programmes with similar objectives, such as environmental programmes (e.g., initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions) or social programmes (e.g., initiatives to improve food literacy among children).
- Establishing a **policy framework** that enables the reduction of costs and risks faced by SMEs and smallholder producers of nutritious foods.
- Creating **certification programmes** to promote producers/suppliers who specialise in sustainable foods.
- **Promoting dialogue** to understand what the local market and different market actors (e.g., producers, retailers and wholesalers) have to offer and

adjust tender requirements accordingly.

- Introducing food systems-based dietary guidelines that set standards for public procurement. (See ***Introducing food systems-based dietary guidelines***).
- Developing a multi-level governance model that delegates some or all PFP authority to local/municipal authorities. **Local governments** are playing a growing role in the development of sustainable food systems and can play a key role in "greening" PFP.
- Developing **social/cultural infrastructure** (e.g., education, social environment, regulatory frameworks and public communication) that leads to changes in belief systems, values and social norms and that predispose people to accept sustainable lifestyle changes (e.g., healthier and more sustainable diets offered by SPP).
- Increasing the **professionalisation of procurement** by appointing professionals trained to design and evaluate procurement programmes based on social, environmental and/or nutritional context.
- Promoting **supply-chain transparency** by requiring or incentivising producers/suppliers to disclose information about their supply chains (e.g., labour practices, product origins or use of pesticides).

Tools and MRV systems to monitor progress

Tools and guidance related to public procurement are increasingly available. These resources can help inform the design of these measures and quantify their impact:

The FAO toolkit on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems

Consists of a set of manuals that provide guidance on how to design, implement, monitor and evaluate nutrition-sensitive food and agriculture policies and programmes. The toolkit is complemented by a series of e-learning courses fit for a diversity of contexts.

Link: https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/884011/

The Good Food Purchasing Programme

Provides a set of tools, technical support and resources for public institutions to help them shift towards a procurement model that prioritises local economies, nutrition, a valued workforce, environmental issues and animal welfare.

Link: https://goodfoodcities.org/

Life cycle assessments (LCA)

Can serve to assess environmental impacts of agri-chains relevant to PFP. For instance, see the LCA methodology proposed by Winans et al., 2020.

Link: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-024-1016-7_19

World Resources Institute's (WRI) Cool Food Pledge

Helps food providers to reduce the climate footprint of the food they serve. The initiative is accompanied by the Cool Food Calculator which helps providers to set targets and track impacts over time.

Link: https://www.wri.org/research/tracking-progress-toward-cool-food-pledge

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WRI's Playbook for Guiding Diners Towards Plant-Rich Dishes in Food Service

Provides food service providers with clear, evidence-based guidance for promoting more plant-rich meals. It can be used by cities to inform their engagement with procurement partners (e.g., restaurants, canteens).

Link: https://wriorg.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/19_Report_Playbook_Plant-Rich_Diets_final.pdf

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Consumption-based emissions inventory

To assess the scale and sources of food-related emissions and inform the development of less emissions-intensive PFP. The Stockholm Environment Institute has developed a guide for local governments to estimate consumption-based GHG emissions.

Link: https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/How-to-cut-your-city-s-consumption-based-emissions?language=en_US

WHO's guidance

Guide on how to build healthy and sustainable public food procurement.

Link: https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2022-6178-45943-66333

WHO's action framework

For developing and implementing public food procurement and service policies for a healthy diet.

Link: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240018341

WHO's action guide

For healthier food and healthier food environments at sports events.

Link: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240075436

Climate change mitigation benefits

Sustainable public food procurement can increase demand for sustainable and healthy food products with lower carbon footprints while reducing demand for unsustainable, less healthy products with higher carbon footprints. This shift in demand can influence upstream food production practices (i.e., causing a greater shift to sustainable production of healthy foods) and have net-positive effect for food systems. This includes reduced GHG emissions from agri-food production and reduced emissions from land-use change and land degradation.

Other environmental benefits

Shifting to more sustainable diets is expected to result in:

- Reduced risk of **eutrophication** due to reduced agricultural inputs and its associated negative effects on water and air pollution. Eutrophication is the process by which aquatic systems become over-enriched with nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus due to the run-off of agricultural inputs (e.g., fertilisers into water systems).
- Reduced **acidification** due to reduced inputs associated with agricultural production (e.g., fertilisers and pesticides).
- Improvements in soil health.
- Improved air quality due to reduced use of fertilisers and fossil energy sources.

Adaptation benefits

Depending on the design of PFP measures, potential adaptation benefits include:

- Enhanced food security, health and population resilience
- Protected biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Implementation of groundwater protections and reduced water pollution
- Reduced pressure on water and land resources
- Reduced land use change and land degradation .

Other sustainable development benefits

Specific benefits **depend on the type of food** that is being purchased through public procurement, but may include:

- High environmental sustainability associated with procurement of organic, seasonal and local foods, and procurement which reduces waste.
- High social sustainability associated with procurement of healthy or fair-trade food and that which is produced in safe working conditions.
- High economic sustainability (e.g., job creation, increased wages and general economic development) associated with procurement of local and national foods.
- Procurement of local and organic foods scores high on all three sustainability dimensions.

- Activities related to this policy objective **directly contribute to achieving SDG 12.7**: “Sustainable public procurement practices.”
- Other SDGs can also be supported by sustainable PFP policies, including:
    - SDG 1 (No poverty)
    - SDG 2 (Zero hunger)
    - SDG 3 (Good health and well-being)
    - SDG 4 (Quality education)
    - SDG 12 (Responsible/sustainable consumption and production)

- SDG 14 (Life below water)
- SDG 15 (Life on land)

Fresh ceviche for sale at the market in Puerto Montt, in southern Chile.

Main implementation challenges and potential negative externalities and trade-offs

- A high level of **bureaucratic elements** (i.e., technical and administrative requirements) of PFP can act as a barrier for smallholder farmers and other SMEs.
- Socio-economic, political and cultural sensitivities (See ***Introducing food-systems based dietary guidelines***).
- Local SMEs may not have the same logistical infrastructure in place as larger food companies, so if PFP prioritises smaller suppliers over larger ones, it may increase inefficiencies and costs.
- Difficulty in effectively identifying and directing resources towards the most food insecure children and communities.

Measures to minimize challenges and address potential negative externalities and trade-offs

- **Technical assistance and technology sharing** could help integrate SMEs (particularly rural smallholder farms) into the market and make conditions more favourable for their inclusion in PFP.
- Responsible **infrastructural investments** for food processing, transportation and storage can make working with SMEs more cost-effective.

Implementation costs

- A 2018 study commissioned by the German Federal Food Ministry showed that **investing** in healthier food in canteens would increase the cost of a meal by just four cents per meal. The study also found that the cost per meal decreases as the size of canteens increases.
- A sustainable school food programme in **East Ayrshire, Scotland** showed that one euro spent through sustainable school meals can generate up to six euros back to the local community through employment, environmental, health and social benefits.

Intervention in practice

- **Brazil's school feeding procurement** provides an example of a regulatory framework with specific targets and mandatory criteria in food procurement. A law approved in 2009 established that at least 30% of the national fund financing school feeding under the Brazilian National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) must be allocated to procure food from family farmers, with priority given to local family farmers, land reform settlers, traditional communities and organic producers. The programme guarantees a market for around 120,000 family farmers by waiving the requirement for these farms to go through the bidding process. The programme provides at least 30% of the daily nutritional needs for around 43 million students in Brazil.
- The **Policy for Sustainable Development and Food** of Malmö, Sweden is an example of how to set specific targets and implement SPP. Adopted in

2010, the policy aims to make high-quality food available in all public canteens, only procuring sustainable and climate-friendly products. It established targets to exclusively procure organic food by 2020 and to reduce food related GHG emissions by 40% by 2020 (compared to 2002). As of 2023, the city has reached a rate of 70% organic food in public kitchens. Food-related GHG emissions were also reduced by 30%.

- Denmark is a prime example of successful public procurement of organic food. The country has combined public policy initiatives (e.g., procurement goals, financing, labelling and NGO capacity building) and organic sector initiatives (e.g. supply chain collaboration, organic schools for food service and education for kitchen workers).

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