African Food Fellowship

Leading the change in Africa's food systems

Building evidence about food systems leadership

How we monitor food systems leadership, and learn from that

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1. Introduction

To measure and improve its impact, the AFF has developed an extensive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, comprised of different tools. This document describes the Fellowship's efforts to monitor what works and what doesn't, and how it learns from that.

Food systems everywhere can become healthy, inclusive, and sustainable. However, to achieve these outcomes, significant changes are needed globally. Countries across Africa are committed to transforming their food systems; but this requires strong leadership at all governance and implementation levels to bring about system-wide changes.

This is the context for the mission of the African Food Fellowship (AFF): to cultivate food systems leaders who can drive the needed transformations at national and continental levels.

The Africa Food Fellowship operates under the assumption that strong leadership is essential for food system transformation. The Fellowship focuses on training and supporting a new generation of food systems leaders. It aims to build a critical mass of leaders with shared goals, language and capacities who can collectively work towards a shared vision of a healthy, inclusive and sustainable food system. The Fellowship's approach involves recognizing and supporting emerging leaders, fostering collaboration and creating an environment where these leaders can thrive. As per mid 2024 the Fellowship is active in Kenya and Rwanda, with over 137 active fellows across 6 cohorts.

The reasoning behind this focus on leadership is that for systems to change in a desired direction, there is urgent need for people that will advocate for and steer towards these new directions. This is also known as *systems leadership*, an increasingly popular concept among practitioners and academics. Various definitions of the concept exist, but commonalities are that systems leadership involves viewing a situation from a 'balcony'-perspective (Heifetz, 2006) or seeing the entire system like a fish tank, rather than focusing

on individual components (the fish) (Tate, 2009). It is also recognized as a collaborative process that involves working across organizational and geopolitical boundaries to achieve systemic change, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts, shared missions, and building strong relationships among stakeholders to achieve common goals. Welbourn (2013) adds that systems leadership involves extending beyond traditional boundaries, adopting a dynamic and adaptive approach, and building new relationships based on shared vision and responsibilities.

The Fellows applies a broad conception of leadership, meaning that

one, people are leaders in their own capacity and there is not one mold that a systems leader should fit into; and

two, working collectively as a system of leaders is critical for system-wide effect.

There are certain skills and capacities of systems leaders that are explicitly recognized in the African Food Fellowship, based on literature (Ghate, 2013; Hagel, 2015; Senge, 2015). These skills and practices relate to seeing the bigger picture, embracing ambiguity, observe, listening, engaging meaningfully with other stakeholders, collaborating, building trust and self-awareness, and taking actions in new innovative ways. Strengthening these *leadership practices* is core to the AFF. The leaders in the AFF all bring in their diverse skillsets, work in different fields and topics and have their own objectives and learning journeys.

Strengthening leaders in their leadership skills is important, but systems change does not happen with strong leaders alone. This leadership needs to be applied to certain actions. In the AFF, these are referred to as *food systems actions*: activities and practices by any person intending to improve the enabling conditions that give rise to problems in the food system. These enabling conditions and critical levers of food system change are policies and regulations, power dynamics, financial investments and socio-economic incentives (PPIIs). These will affect the decisions of the millions of people shaping the continent's food systems.

At the core of the Fellowship is the desire to learn, not only between Fellows and across contexts, but also about what works to build effective leadership and transformative actions, and why? To measure and improve its impact, the AFF has developed an extensive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework, comprised of different tools. This framework focuses on learning and adaptation, as well as building evidence around food system transformation. The primary users of the MEL system are the Fellows and the Fellowship Secretariat. The AFF is committed to ensuring that the MEL process is not burdensome for Fellows and strives to avoid making the system extractive, but rather providing valuable insights to support their work.

As systems initiatives are emerging across the world, it is worthwhile to take a step back and learn from the AFF's work so far.

This document contains:

1. the theory of change and approach to monitoring and learning,

2. an overview of the different tools used in the AFF and

3. a reflection on what the lessons from the AFF tell us about monitoring systems change.

The core of the Fellowship is the desire to learn about what works to build effective leadership and transformative actions to measure and improve its impact

2. The Fellowship approach to monitoring and learning

Figure 1:
The AFF Theory of Change as monitoring and learning structure

In order to shift Policies, Power dynamics, Investments and Incentives (PPIIs) for inclusive, healthy and sustainable food systems, we believe that leaders beyond the usual ones will need to be recognised, invited in and held accountable as leaders of food systems change and that food systems actions will need to work synergistically across sectors.

To lead to these two ultimate outcomes, three complementary intermediate outcomes are defined to promote and strengthen the individual and collective capacity of Fellows to elevate their work.

Specifically, these are:

1. 'stronger leaders'- effective systems leadership practices by Fellows as individual food systems leaders,
2. influential food systems actions by Fellows; and
3. 'growing collective leadership'- strong national and continental networks driving food systems actions by food systems leaders.

The Theory of Change is based on a number of assumptions, the most important one being that food systems leadership facilitates shifts in policies & regulations, power dynamics, socio-economic incentives and investments leading to food system transformation. Other assumptions that underpin the Theory of Change are that Fellows have the will and capacity to adapt, learn and make change happen with a long term commitment to improve food systems, and that other stakeholders – such as governments – believe that an inclusive, healthy and sustainable food system is desirable.

Two principles of AFF monitoring and learning

1. Building evidence on the role of leadership in food system transformation in Africa

The AFF intends to learn about leadership for food systems change in African and as such builds evidence on certain areas of the ToC, especially the two layers of outcomes and assumptions.

The overarching knowledge question is: *How does individual and collective leadership promote inclusive, healthy and sustainable food system transformation?* This is investigated through sub-questions:

At impact level:

1. What changes in PPIIs do we see emerge in the selected impact areas and at what level(s)?

At ultimate outcome level:

2. In what ways does leadership development contribute to or constrain systemic change?
3. How do food systems leaders contribute to shifts in PPII in the selected impact areas?
4. How is the perception on leadership evolving?
5. How do food systems actions jointly led by Fellows contribute to shifts in PPII in the selected impact areas?
6. What role did/does the African Food Fellowship play in supporting Fellows to contribute to systemic changes?

At intermediate outcome level:

7. What leadership practices are applied by Fellows, per impact area and/or in food systems actions?
8. In which spaces are Fellows showing up and how relevant are these spaces for food system transformation?
9. How is Fellows' career progressing?
10. To what extent do Fellows stay motivated to drive change in their impact areas? What are reasons for staying motivated or not?
11. How is collective leadership practiced in the food system actions?
12. What are the mechanisms, "ingredients" that are facilitating or inhibiting collective leadership?
13. Which food systems actions are prioritized/initiated by Fellows in their respective impact areas?

These questions are examined using 9 different tools described in the section 3.

The AFF also monitors her activities and outputs for management purposes. This is not detailed in the document.

2. Learning for adaptive management.

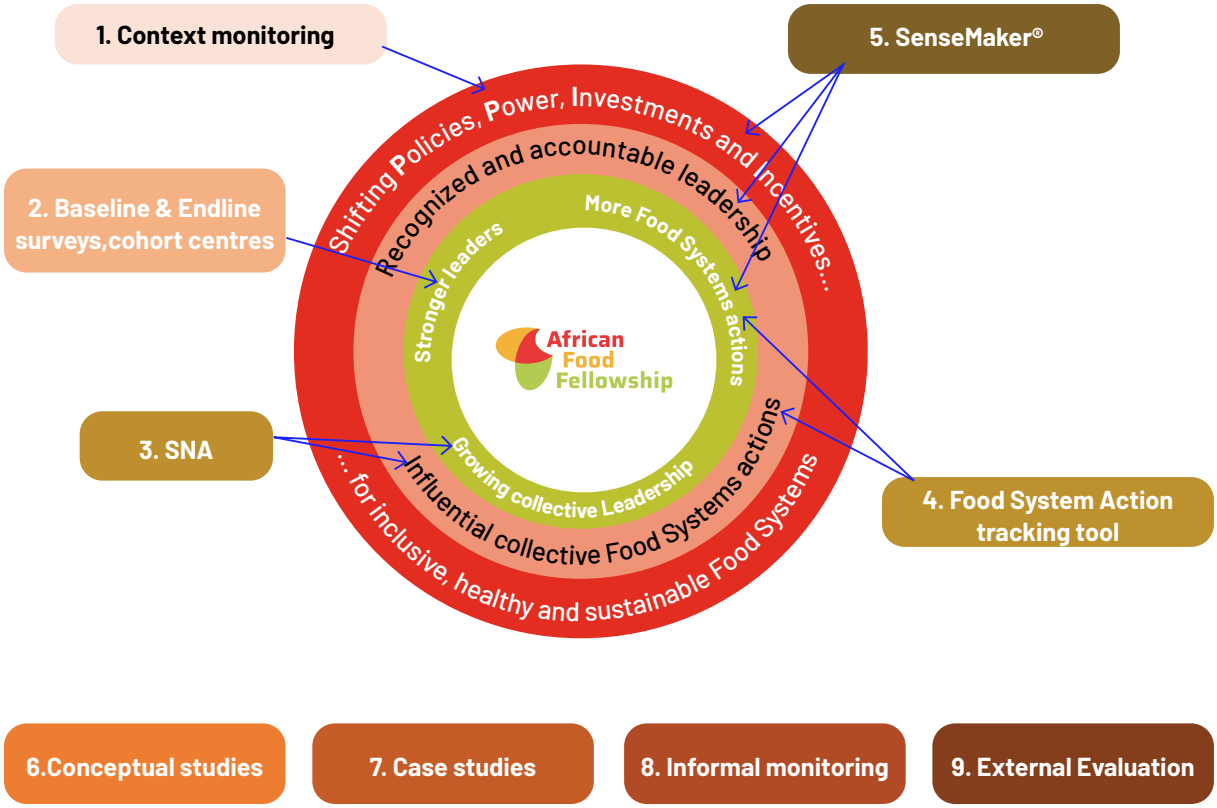
To effectively support Fellows in their leadership journeys and make systemic change happen in food systems, learning is at the core of the AFF. *Reflexive monitoring*[1] , an approach to learning that involves partly structured collective reflection sometimes based on data, and adaptation following the reflection process, is practiced. In the end, monitoring leadership for transformative change in food systems is a novel area which requires frequent reflection moments to guide collective decision making. Many opportunities to learn are in use at the AFF: some are structured using tools with explicit questions, others are structured-facilitated processes (ex. annual retreat, post-event sessions or experiment card-fed reflections on innovations), and finally others are guided conversations (ex. the technical mentors and coaches community of practices). The AFF aspires to learn from successes, failures and also uncomfortable conversations or events.

1 Cf: Normalization Process Theory | Reflexive Monitoring (northumbria.ac.uk)

3. Tools for learning and evidence building

The visual below shows how 9 tools support the ToC: context monitoring, baseline/endline studies, Social Network Analysis (SNA), SenseMaker®, Food System Actions tracking tool, Conceptual Research, Case studies, Informal monitoring and External Evaluation.

Figure 1:
Tools supporting the Theory of Change



While some of the tools developed support building the evidence of a few part(s) of the ToC, other tools are more cross-cutting for example bringing an external perspective to the ToC. A short description of each tool, including rationale and possibly examples of data, information or insights gathered through it is presented below.

1. Context monitoring

To track whether leaders are addressing systems change, there is a need to track their actions and the impact of these actions. Similarly, leaders do not perform certain actions in a vacuum: they are shaped by the context they find themselves in, such as the regulatory environment, but also their position and network. Therefore, it is important to track the context in which the leaders operate. *Context monitoring* can be defined as the systematic collection of information about local or global conditions and external factors relevant to the implementation and performance of the African Food Fellowship. Such factors can be global trends - climate change- having local consequences, macro-economic indicators, social or political conditions and other -leadership or food systems- interventions. The purpose of context monitoring is to ensure relevance of the AFF work and alignment with other stakeholders if necessary, and to assess changes in the context that could inform food systems change.

Context monitoring: the list of contextual items monitored in Rwanda

Topic	Trend
Agricultural policy shifts	Subsidies introduced
	Ammendment to tax laws
	Food system incentives introduced
	Government/private sector programs (trade promotion)
	New commerce regulations introduced/ammendment
	Food safety regulations introduced
Financing for food systems	Allocation towards agricuture from the government
	Private sector engagement
Innovations in & Research on FS	Effects of climate change on agriculture

2. Baseline and endline surveys

Baseline and endline studies are an important part of any MEL framework and are used to determine whether change has happened and how the intervention has contributed to this.

In the AFF, these studies have been done since the beginning with a primary focus on the contribution of the Fellowship programme to the Fellows' personal leadership development. They contain basic information about the Fellows (e.g type of employer and position, sector(s) involved in) as well as information about the perception of Fellows around leadership, about their current knowledge of and preferences with regards food systems and approach in their work.

In the endline surveys, additional questions are asked to assess the performance of the leadership programme.

3.Social network analysis

SNA (Social Network Analysis) allows the visualisation of the relationships between actors and therefore a network's connectivity. As Converge puts it " SNA offers an empirical way to represent the patterns of (dis)connection among participants at a given moment in time. This provides important clues about where clusters are forming, how information is flowing, and where to weave relationships[2]. " SNA is used to map the relationships between Fellows and the food systems they operate in.

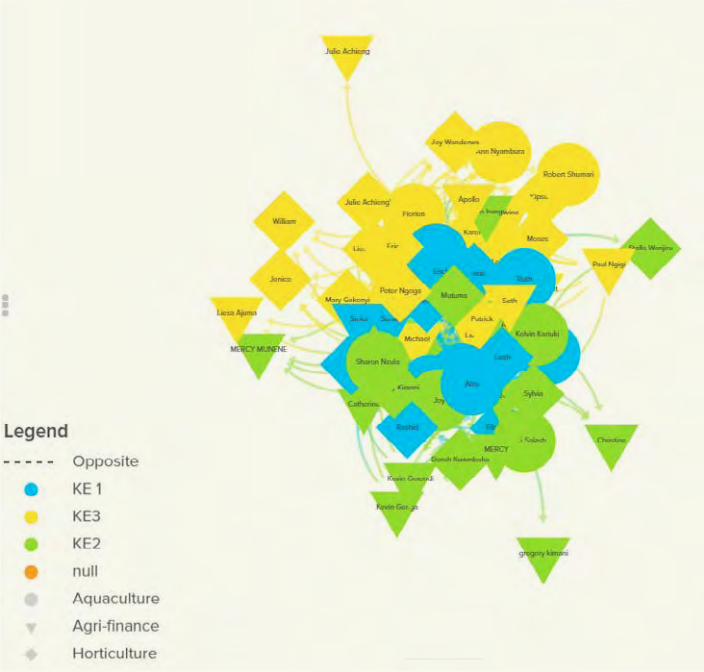
In the 1st SNA implemented for the AFF, the focus was making visible the connections between Fellows within cohorts (relationship building, action, learning, access to resources) and the depth of the connections. A few metrics were chosen to analyse the various maps generated: Number of elements, number of connections, average degree, network density, reciprocity and indegree[3]

2 https://www.converge.net/toolkit/conducting-asocial-network-analysis

3 The definitions of these terms are based on definitions in KUMU and documents provided by Small Foundation: SF-Eval-Toolkit-FAQ_June-2021.pdf (smallfoundation.ie) and SF Eval Toolkit_FINAL(smallfoundation.ie)

SNA: Partial results of the SNA done in March-April '24 in Kenya and Rwanda.

1. Representation of the learning-focus mapping for Kenyan Fellows / emphasis on Fellows



Average degree: 17,11.

Network density: 16%

Reciprocity: 0.28

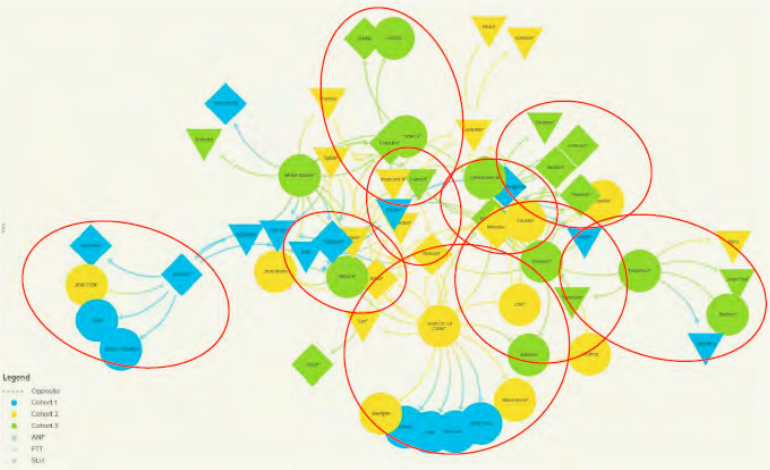
Conclusion: Similar results as with the relationships building purpose. Room to weave more connections between Fellows.

Degree metric

Rank	Label	Value
1	Proscovia*	23
2	Erick*	21
3	Charles*	18
4	Dave*	18
5	Fredrick*	17

The "top 5" Fellows in terms of connections for learning are from the aquaculture impact area, cohort 1.

2. Representation of the action-focus mapping for Rwandan Fellows / emphasis on connected Fellows



Average degree: 3.38.

Network density: 11%

Conclusion: Network density for this purpose is lower than for the purposes of relationships building or learning. It shows that connecting for action takes time and maturity of the network. What is interesting to note is that Fellows connect with at least 3 other Fellows to come to action.

4.Food System Actions tracking tool

The Food System Actions tracking tool (also known as the tracker) is meant to capture the food systems actions (FSA)[4] identified and developed by Fellows as individual or as a group of Fellows, and provide a structure to plan and assess progress of these FSAs.

The tracker can be used for management purpose -what are Fellows putting in practice considering the support they have received? How effective are they?- and also for evaluative purpose: what do Fellows intend to do in the food systems? What are they able to do: why/why not? What are the effects of the activities implemented? What are the conditions that allowed/constrained their work?

The tracker covers the 'what' Fellows intend to change and 'how' in general terms and supports Fellows to reflect and learn to better plan for the next activities of the FSA. It is also an accountability tool for the user(s), the Fellows, towards themselves.

Food System Actions tracking tool: a summary of parts of the form completed by Rashid Jattani Boru, a Horticulture Kenyan Fellow from cohort 1 who is working with 3 other Fellows from cohort 1 Justus Wanjala (aquaculture), Gatabaki Sieka and Grace Njoroge (both in agrifinance) on his FSA in the Eastern Region of Kenya.

Title of the FSA: Building system resilience in agro-pastoral households

About the most pressing systemic problems and gaps.

The food system in Isiolo County faces significant challenges, particularly concerning the perception and use of nutritious vegetables at the household level. Indigenous vegetables, despite their high nutritional value, are not widely grown or consumed locally. This may be due to a lack of awareness about their benefits and preparation methods, as well as negative attitudes towards these vegetables. Addressing the reasons behind their underutilization is crucial, as cultivating these vegetables could greatly enhance nutrition and livelihoods in the region.

The situation is further exacerbated by rising malnutrition during the dry season. According to the SMART 2019 survey, only 35.4% of households in Isiolo County consume iron-rich foods, and 59.3% consume Vitamin A-rich foods, highlighting a significant deficiency in dietary diversity and nutrition. These statistics reinforce the need to promote the cultivation and consumption of indigenous vegetables to improve nutrition and health outcomes in Isiolo County.

Description of the FSA

The goal is to increase the cultivation, consumption, and awareness of indigenous vegetables in Isiolo County to improve dietary diversity and nutrition outcomes. This will be achieved through a multi-faceted approach involving education, promotion, and support for local farmers.

Education and Awareness Campaigns-Implement educational programs targeting households, schools, and community groups to raise awareness about the nutritional benefits of indigenous vegetables and how to prepare them. This will involve workshops, cooking demonstrations, and informational materials distributed through various channels.

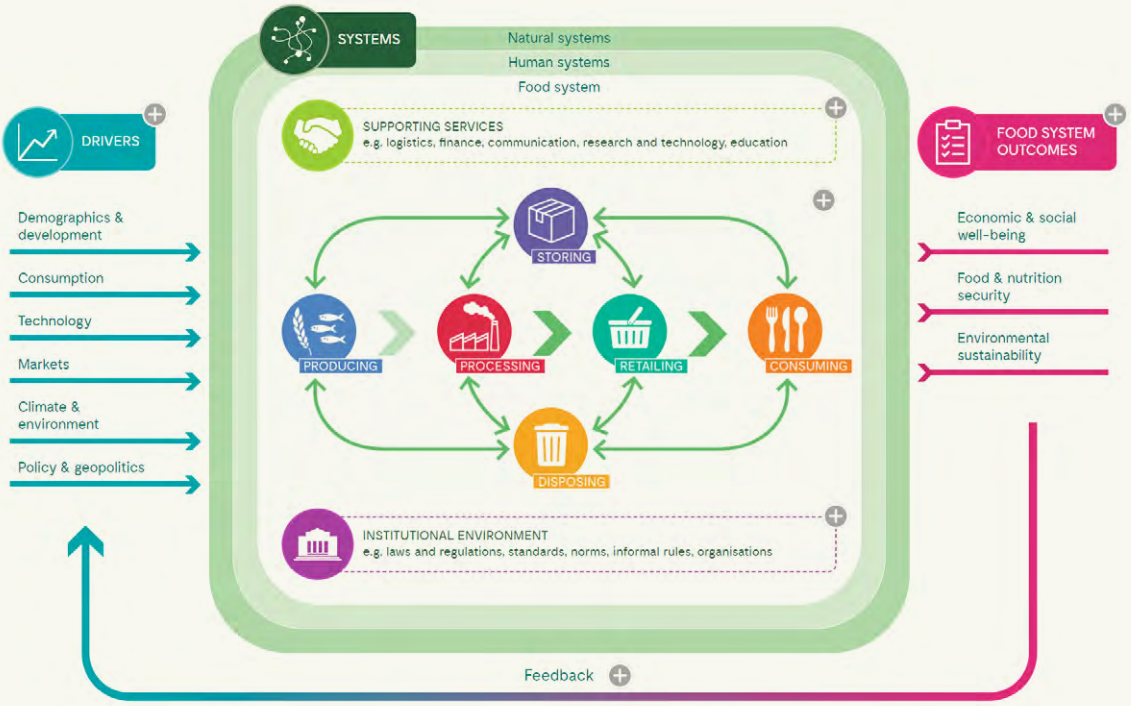
4 Food systems actions are activities and practices by any group or person intending to improve the enabling conditions that give rise to problems in the food system.

Market Development- Facilitate the creation of local markets or market linkages where farmers can sell their produce. This may involve collaborating with local markets, restaurants, and retailers to incorporate indigenous vegetables into their offerings.

Monitoring and Evaluation-Measure success through regular monitoring of household dietary diversity, consumption patterns of indigenous vegetables, and nutritional outcomes. Surveys and assessments can be conducted periodically to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Community Engagement-Engage with community leaders, influencers, and stakeholders to garner support and address negative perceptions or cultural barriers associated with indigenous vegetables. Encourage community participation and ownership of initiatives. Need to ensure community understands nutritious value of vegetables.

Visualizing what in the Food Systems the FSA is targeting (explanation of the Foresight4Food Food Systems Framework here)



Activities prioritized in the 2nd semester of 2024

Rashid Jattani Boru is planning to work on the following key actions in the coming 5 months:

1. Involve actors working in the system (for example: Ministry of agriculture and health; Farmers in the business for a while to learn from them; Development entities; Local implementing networks to see where complementary lies)
2. Start thinking about how to fund developing concept note
3. Talk to network to seek funding to initiate the process

5. SenseMaker®

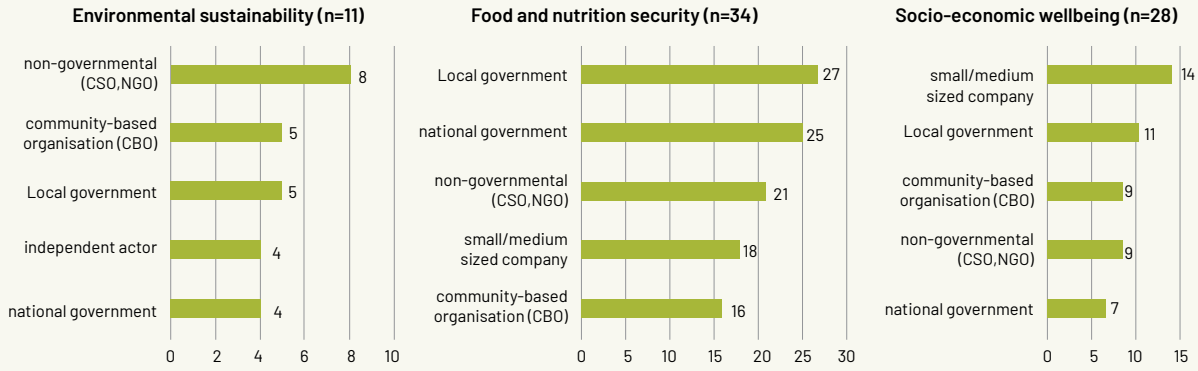
SenseMaker® is a complexity-aware, narrative-based method that was chosen from the beginning of the AFF to capture how Fellows practice leaderships and the results of their work, as perceived by the Fellows themselves. The method was used as little is known about how leadership is practiced in and supports the variety of paths towards food system transformation. Fellows decide which experiences they want to share and they give additional meaning and information while answering a number of questions. These questions are centred around: aspects of the food systems the experience relates to, the knowledge used and actors involved, and which leadership characteristics the experience touches upon. Twice a year an AFF team does a meta-analysis of the experiences shared before sharing it again with Fellows to make sense together of the findings and trends. These moments where the MLE team and Fellows meet to look at and discuss the preliminary findings are called 'sensemaking or learning sessions'.

SenseMaker®: illustrations of the findings generated after a sensemaking sessions with a group of Kenyan and Rwandan Fellows in November '23.

About the actors Fellows involved in the experiences they shared and in relation to the food system outcomes they intend to influence

→ The findings from SenseMaker®

The experience I shared is aiming for impact in...



→ Sense making with Fellows: Indeed, different actors have different interests in outcomes (environmental sustainability, food and nutrition security, socioeconomic wellbeing). This makes working on outcomes combined difficult although necessary and requested. There is a need to have more awareness on environmental sustainability outside the NGO arena and to bring the silos of

6. Conceptual research

Conceptual research is meant to explore different perspectives of food systems leadership across the continent based on academic insights and practice.

In 2022, the AFF commissioned a conceptual research which underlined the diversities in African food systems, and the urgency to expose the foundations for credible 'decolonial' insights into leadership underpinning systems transformations in Africa. Following up on these insights, the African Food Fellowship is now focusing on exploring how systems leadership contribute to and/or constrain systems transformation and on how different African countries demonstrate how collective (food)systems leadership in manifested and the outcomes achieved.

7. Case studies

Case-studies are in-depth case studies into the actual practices of food system leaders in real-life context. They seek to understand how Fellows use their individual and collective leadership practices to drive systems actions, and whether there are early signals that these actions are contributing to food system transformation outcomes.

Case study 1 / aquaculture.

Below a summary. For all details, please read at: Aquaculture-Food-Systems-Leadership-Case-Study.pdf (africanfoodFellowship.org)

WHO: Fred Juma

Systems leadership practices	Observed practices	Quotes
Accessing and engaging a broad network of stakeholders	Having a **shared vision and values** across stakeholders	*One of the governments big four agendas is food security and as a bank we try to run with the agenda of the government. Food and food security is key. For Port Victoria, we want to help the farmers and communities to diversify[…] that is why we are supporting [the initiative]'* *We know Fred because he is someone who opens up and shares whatever he has with the government, in terms of documentation, ideas and everything. When you start interrogating Fred, he presents everything, so that makes the government to trust him and support him*
	Nurturing a solid base of trust	
	Creating **synergies** across stakeholders	
	Leverage existing leadership	
	Nurturing collective leadership	
Daring to try something new	Being **innovative and take calculated risks**	*He has worked well with the community by incorporating them in his activities like in production of black soldier flies. He is not just doing so in farming, but also engaging people to supervise them, provide market support and this helps avoid conflict.*
	Be **responsive** to changes	
Influencing decisions in network/system	Having **legitimacy and authority**	*'When he paid me the first time, my child had been chased away from school so it helped me settle the arrears. The second time I got paid, I bought my child medicine. I continue breeding more black soldier and increasing the quantity as I had been taught. I eventually will get building materials and build a house' BSF farmer*
	Building **evidence**	
	Building **reputation**	

8. Informal monitoring

Informal monitoring is used to capture informal yet meaningful conversations with Fellows, in which they share practices, challenges, successes and how the AFF has supported them. It was defined to fill in a gap in documenting the tacit knowledge the AFF team gathered about each individual Fellow.

Beyond recording the content of the conversation, the template allows the person who filled in the form to share his/her reflections about the conversation and actions decided based on the conversation.

9. External evaluation

The learning-oriented external impact evaluation brings an external, objective perspective to the work the AFF does. It is directed towards informing the strategy for the following phase of scaling (phase 3 of the African Food Fellowship) while also assessing: DAC criteria (relevance/ added value of the initiative for Fellows; performance – effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of its set-up), contribution of the AFF towards food system transformation (as in changes in the selected impact areas selected in Kenya and Rwanda) and testing the main assumption of the AFF ToC. The inception phase was finalised in Feb '24.

Informal monitoring: extracts of a form completed about a Fellow from Rwanda cohort 1 in July '24. **Kelvin Odoobo's Food System Revolution: How AFF transformed his startup.**

Content of the conversation

Kelvin's journey began a decade ago when he moved from Kenya to Rwanda. For ten years, he worked closely with farmers, witnessing firsthand the challenges they faced, including a lack of comprehensive solutions in one place. Driven to make a difference, Kelvin started his own tech startup, Shambapro Limited. Shambapro 's app helps small farm business owners manage their resources better, boost yields, and grow their businesses using climate-smart practices.

Kelvin's connection with the African Food Fellowship (AFF) started when he joined the first cohort of the Food System Leadership Program (FSLP). This network opened new doors for him. As he graduated, he saw the AFF community as a valuable resource. Fellow entrepreneurs became potential clients for his app, while those working with organizations supporting farmers could help connect him to more opportunities.

Thanks to AFF, Kelvin's vision of improving farm management through Shambapro is becoming a reality, helping farmers thrive and making a real impact on the food system.

Reflections

Kelvin's story highlights the transformative power of networking and professional programs like AFF in driving innovation and impact. By leveraging the AFF network for opportunities and connections, Kelvin effectively expanded his startup's reach and impact. His entrepreneurial spirit and the benefits of the Food System Leadership Program underscore the importance of such initiatives in equipping individuals to drive meaningful change in food systems.

4. Lessons learnt and reflection

Significance of a well-grounded, articulated and broadly owned Theory of Change (ToC): This framework, based on research on how to transform food systems as well as internal vision, is pivotal in shaping interventions and the Monitoring, Learning, and Evaluation (MLE) processes. The AFF is committed to continue building the body of knowledge around the role of leadership in food systems transformation; this requires a regular review of its theory of change.

Time investment in developing the monitoring and learning: Crafting the monitoring and learning took time due to the simultaneous development and implementation of the AFF offer. This was challenging, especially with designing tools without a clear view of how collective aspects in the ToC would manifest in practice. Tools like SenseMaker® evolved from building evidence for system leadership to focusing on food system transformation and leadership's role in it.

Power of continuous learning and need to embrace emergence, flexibility and adaptability: Working on a complexity-focused intervention requires a constant review and learning process, around the ToC, based on implementation and practices and feedback from Fellows. It therefore asks for a regular review of the learning questions, and subsequently monitoring and learning tools. This creates tension between building a body of evidence, re-thinking what plausible evidence is, and the need for adaptation.

Time required for observing the transformed state, while seeking to capture the incremental progresses on the transformation journey: Recognizing that transformation takes time, the focus is on tracking small steps in the journey. The challenge lies in capturing the essence of change (understanding the "HOW") without getting lost in details.

Data collection challenges: Even with Fellows' involvement in designing tools and being invited to shape and participate in the sense making sessions, gathering data remains difficult. Fellows remain the main source of data, and their time is constrained. It emphasizes the need for both formal and informal monitoring methods to build robust evidence, also capturing informal discussions that may provide deeper insights into the AFF's impact on leadership and the actions Fellows are taking.

While we are at the onset of data collection and analysis and continuously learning, we already sense that the processes in place in the AFF to build evidence on the role of leadership in food system transformation can also be applied to tracking systems change relating to domains outside of leadership.

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