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Meridian Institute Publishes Climate Change and Food Systems: Assessing Impacts and Opportunities

Meridian Institute and diverse group of global authors call for actions to create more sustainable food systems. Using a food systems perspective creates better opportunities to mitigate climate change and adapt to climate change. A food systems perspective allows people to see how food choices or government policies or agricultural development programs reduces or increases climate change. A food systems perspective also encourages engagement of the full range of stakeholders that should be involved in food systems transformation, including people concerned with public health, environmental health, food security, and climate change. A systems perspective is critical to addressing climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which cover multiple sectors that are linked by food.

Food and agriculture are significant contributors to, and heavily impacted by, climate change. With an estimated 30 percent of total global GHG emissions coming from food and agriculture, there are significant opportunities for mitigating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Despite a growing body of literature about climate change and agriculture, relatively little analysis and focus has been put on climate change and *food systems*, more broadly. The narrower focus on climate change and agricultural production prevents consideration of broader mitigation and adaptation strategies as well as the systems-level effects of narrowly targeted interventions.

Meridian Institute's report "[Climate Change and Food Systems: Assessing Impacts and Opportunities](#)" synthesizes peer-reviewed literature on the mutual impacts of food system activities and climate change and developed [10 key messages](#).

1. Food systems have significant, adverse effects on climate change, and climate change impacts food systems in many complex ways.
2. A food systems perspective is required for transformative change.

3. Immediate action is possible and needed as a stepping stone to food system transformation. The Authors documented many [mitigation opportunities and their adaptation potential](#) for specific regions, including: India, Latin America, West Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, New Zealand, and the United States.
4. Equity issues should be central to creating fair, sustainable, and resilient food systems.
5. Actions need to consider local, Indigenous, and practitioner knowledge.
6. More peer-reviewed, systems-level information and research is urgently required.
7. More research on the impacts of food system interventions is needed, in particular in low- and middle-income economies.
8. New approaches and decision-support tools are required.
9. Food system transformations require the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders.
10. Governance and institutional innovations are required for system transformation.

Food systems are complex, heterogeneous, and dynamic (as illustrated in the figure, below). Differences in food systems lead to variations in nutrition, health, and sustainability outcomes. Outcomes of our current food systems are not equitable.

Much of the research has focused on high-income countries, but people have a lot to learn from food systems in low- and middle-income countries where many communities (including Indigenous Peoples) are working on increasing or preserving the sustainability, resilience and equity of their food systems. This knowledge is often difficult to access and is ignored by peer-reviewed research. A critical effort is needed to highlight and bridge local, Indigenous, practitioner, and academic knowledge in designing actions that transform food systems.

Using broad perspectives on food system activities will help stakeholders explore new partnerships, share knowledge, and identify diverse groups of people that need to work together to improve the sustainability, equity and resilience of their food systems.

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Food System Components, Processes, and Activities



Figure 1: Food system components, processes, and activities