ANALYSING FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF THE SEQOTA DECLARATION

MSC THESIS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY GROUP

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ABSTRACT

Everyone seems to agree that our food systems are failing us and that changes are necessary in order to achieve more sustainable, inclusive food systems. There also seems to be an agreement that handling food systems issues through a systematic approach instead of a siloed one could enable better food systems outcomes, including improved nutrition and health. As a result of this realisation, many conceptualisations of the food systems approach have emerged and key actors have been increasingly embracing this approach. However, although food systems governance arrangements will play a critical role in stimulating or hindering transformations, this area has been under-researched and there have only been a few conceptualisations of food systems governance to date.

This thesis contributed towards addressing this research gap through providing an in-depth empirical application of the combination of a food systems governance framework consisting of five governance principles and a framework consisting of five governance capabilities to a unique governance arrangement in Ethiopia—The Seqota Declaration—that is committed to ending stunting in children under two by 2030.

The aim of this thesis was to diagnose the Seqota Declaration initiative against the key principles appropriate for food systems governance and explore the presence or absence of governance capabilities necessary for achieving progress during the implementation of the initiative. The results confirm the prevalence of the five principles and capabilities in the initiative and the stakeholders driving it, albeit to varying levels.

Overall, the efforts appear promising, but they do face a number of limitations that could jeopardise successes in the implementation of the initiative. Whilst resource constraint has been identified as a major hindrance to progress, what is being done with the resources that are available should also be taken into account. This thesis outlines some of the areas where governance issues may hinder progress. The strengths of the initiative include the presence of systems-thinking, a high number of enabling structures for improved collaboration, a high level of innovations, and strong ownership by government stakeholders across the different scales and sectors. However, system dynamics are given less consideration, human capital to fill the new structures is not there, long-term sustainability may be questionable, and there is space for improvement for third sector and private sector inclusion.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AfDB	African Development Bank
AITEC	Agricultural Innovation and Technology Centers
CL	Community Lab
EDHS	Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey
EIAR	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research
ENN	Emergency Nutrition Network
EPHI	Ethiopian Public Health Institute
FBPIDI	Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical Industry Development Institute
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FMHACA	Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration
FNC	Food and Nutrition Council
FNP	Food and Nutrition Policy
FPDU	Federal Program Delivery Unit
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
GAIN	Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition
GCA	Government Communication Affairs
GoE	Government of Ethiopia
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFEC	Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoT	Ministry of Trade
MoWIE	Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity
MoWCA	Ministry of Women & Children's Affairs
MoWCY	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation

NCB	Nutrition Coordinating Body
NDMCC	National Disaster Management Coordination Council
NDP	Nutrition Development Partners
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NNP	National Nutrition Program
NTC	Nutrition Technical Committee
PDU	Program Delivery Unit
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
RPDU	Regional Program Delivery Unit
SBCC	Social behaviour change communication
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SI	Strategic initiative
SO	Strategic objective
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNISE	Unified Nutrition Information System for Ethiopia
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1 INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia has made considerable economic progress in the past 20 years, which resulted in a reduction in poverty rate (FDRE, 2016a). However, despite the economic successes, due to rapid population growth, the prevalence of undernutrition in the country remains high. A recent workshop also identified low dietary diversity, inadequate intake of protein, energy and various micronutrient deficiencies among the Ethiopian population, and overnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases are also on the rise (EPHI, 2019), making the country suffer from malnutrition in all its forms. The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) recognises the cost of malnutrition on its human capital and made addressing the aforementioned nutrition challenges—with a particular focus on the health of under five children and their mothers—a government priority.

On the one hand, food and nutrition security can be characterised as a 'wicked problem' (i.e. Candel, Breeman & Termeer, 2016), that is "a problem that changes continuously, is fundamentally complex and unpredictable, and, as a result, is incredibly difficult to solve" (Bosker, 2020, p. 14.). On the other hand, food systems that determine food and nutrition security outcomes are also complex and dynamic, and the processes and their different components are interconnected, often occurring at multiple levels and scales (Ericksen et al., 2010, Bosker, 2020, p. 30). The GoE recognised that to improve food and nutrition security, a more holistic systems approach was necessary. Such an approach—called the food systems approach—has already been embraced by various international organisations and has been gaining recognition by national governments as well.

Through a unique governance arrangement—The Seqota Declaration—the GoE committed to ending stunting in children under two by 2030. Signed in and named after a town that has been heavily affected by childhood stunting, the declaration's vision is to "see Ethiopian children being free from undernutrition" and its goal is to end stunting in children under two by 2030 (FDRE, 2018b). The initiative was signed by the highest level leaders, such as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Regional Presidents of the country, making it "the first multi-sectoral programming document of its type to be signed by political actors" (Karanja Odhiambo et al. 2019. p 9). The initiative's goal has since become widely known and embraced by a variety of stakeholders, such as representatives from the government sectors across the different levels, development partners and the civil society (Karanja Odhiambo et al. 2019). Building on the work of the National Nutrition Program II (NNP II), the Seqota Declaration initiative sets out to accelerate the pace of the delivery of existing programmes through testing new approaches and innovations (FDRE, 2018b). The initiative seems to embrace a food systems approach as it aims to leverage a variety of existing policies, strategies and programmes and promote multi-sectoral multi-stakeholder cooperation in order to tackle the root causes of child undernutrition (FDRE, 2016b).

The commitments the GoE has made provide an opportunity to catalyse change in the food systems in Ethiopia and put the country on the right track towards the elimination

of child undernutrition. However, in order to make a long-lasting impact, whilst a good action plan is essential, it is not sufficient. Scholars have suggested that food systems governance arrangements will play a critical role in stimulating or hindering transformations (Delaney et al., 2016, van Bers et al., 2019). Regardless of initial successes in implementation, governance institutions are often resistant to transformative change and easily fall back to old tendencies during the long-term implementation process (Termeer, Drimie, Ingram, Pereira & Whittingham, 2018, Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019). Therefore, to improve food system outcomes, such as food and nutrition security, understanding the nature of food system governance arrangements and the factors that could enable or hinder change is crucial.

The aim of this research is twofold: i) diagnose the Seqota Declaration against the key principles appropriate for food systems governance and ii) explore the presence or absence of governance capabilities necessary for achieving progress during the implementation of the Seqota Declaration.

To explore the nature of the Seqota Declaration from a food systems perspective and to explore the factors that could enable or hinder transformation, this paper will combine two frameworks: a diagnostic framework for food system governance arrangements that outlines five principles for appropriate food system governance (Termeer et al. 2018) and a framework that identifies five governance capabilities for dealing wisely with wicked problems (Termeer, Dewulf, Breeman & Stiller, 2015, Termeer & Dewulf, 2014). The combination of governance principles and governance capabilities could prove essential for achieving progress in the context of wicked problems in food systems. On the one hand, adhering to appropriate food system governance principles could foster an enabling environment for institutions and policymakers to tackle complex issues. On the other hand, to uphold such principles, institutions and policymakers need to possess certain capabilities that equip them to manage such problems.

Through applying the synthesis of the two frameworks to the case of the Seqota Declaration initiative, the thesis aims to answer the following two research questions:

- *To what extent are the principles of food system governance incorporated in the Seqota Declaration initiative?*
- *To what extent are governance capabilities that are needed to achieve progress during the implementation of the Seqota Declaration present?*

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE FOOD SYSTEMS APPROACH

The concept of food systems has attracted research interest as early as the late 1990s (Ingram, 2011), but it was not until the food price crises of 2007/2008 and 2010 that research and debates on how to approach them through a systems perspective were catalysed (Hospes & Brons, 2016). The crises unveiled a shortcoming of the productivist paradigm of the time, which assumed that increased food availability would equal increased food security. The food security crisis following the food price crisis demonstrated that despite increased food production and availability, other, less technical and more political and societal components, such as access to food, are also at play and have an impact on food security outcomes (Ingram, 2011). This shed light on the limitations of approaches to food and nutrition security that often had a narrow focus, and whilst considered certain elements of the food system in question (e.g. the food value chain), it failed to consider it as a whole.

The realisation prompted the re-evaluation of the trends at the time and called for a more holistic way of approaching food systems and how they are affecting societal outcomes, such as food security, ecosystem services and social welfare (Ericksen, 2008; Ingram, 2011). Since then, many policymakers and major international organisations and global partnerships—such as the United Nations or the CGIAR—have been increasingly embracing this perspective. As such, a variety of conceptualisations of the food system approach have emerged.

Regardless of the diversity in conceptualising and displaying the food systems approach, the core characteristics attributed to food systems per se are relatively persistent. A food system

> *gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes (HLPE, 2017, p. 11).*

The HLPE framework distinguishes between three elements in food systems, namely food supply chains, food environments and consumer behaviour (HLPE, 2017). These three elements can be regarded as both the entry points for nutrition interventions and exit points for nutrition and may determine an individual's diet. Another key feature of food systems is the drivers of food system changes. The report identifies five drivers that can affect value chains, the food environment and consumer behaviour, but the three elements can also affect the drivers vice versa. The five drivers are biophysical and environmental drivers; innovation, technology and infrastructure drivers; political and economic drivers; socio-cultural drivers; and demographic drivers (HLPE, 2017). Figure 2.1 illustrates the conceptual framework.

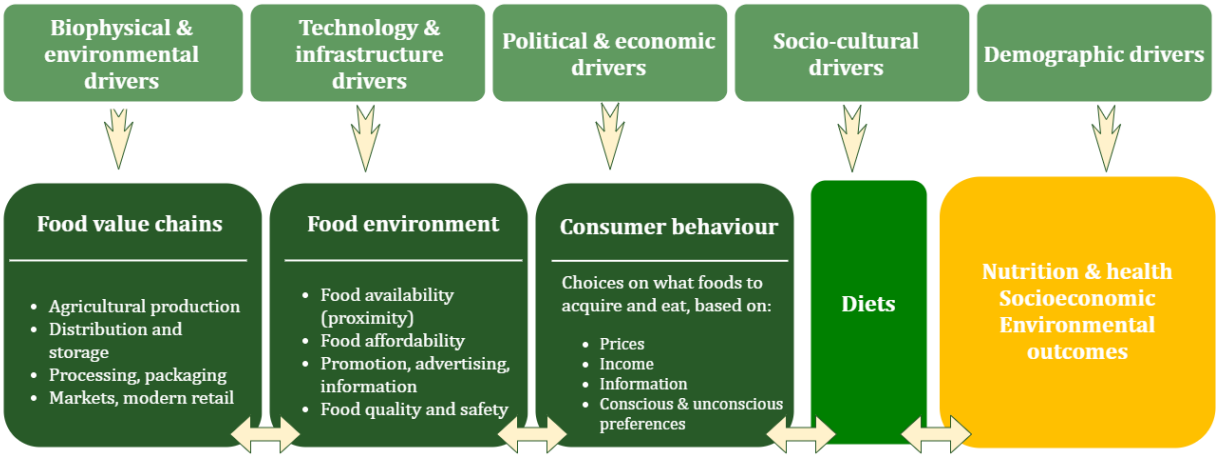

Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework of food systems. Source: Author's own based on de Brauw et al. 2019 and HLPE 2020 framework.

A holistic approach to food systems considers the systems in their totality and recognises that food systems, their drivers, elements, activities and outcomes are connected not only with each other but also with other systems (e.g. health, energy, transportation systems) and cannot be analysed in isolation (HLPE, 2017.). Their interactions can be multiscale (e.g. spatial, temporal, jurisdictional, institutional, management), cross-scale, multilevel (meaning that they may be situated at different levels on the aforementioned scales) and cross-level (Ericksen et al., 2010).

2.2 FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNANCE CAPABILITIES

Governance refers to the act of governing and involves all activities undertaken by societal organisations, such as governments, private companies, unions, NGOs, and international organisations, to solve societal problems (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020). Food governance entails the institutions, actors, rules, norms and power relations that shape the practice of governing how food is produced, distributed, accessed, and utilised (Margulis & Duncan, 2016).

Given the complex nature of food systems, the variety of actors, institutions, processes, etc. involved, traditional ways of understanding governance will not be appropriate to analyse food systems governance (Termeer et al., 2018). However, even though governance is crucial for the optimal functioning of food systems and for fostering positive outcomes, food systems governance per se is a field that has not been extensively studied so far (Hospes & Brons, 2016, Delaney et al., 2018, Termeer et al., 2018).

In order to enable the analysis of food systems governance arrangements, Termeer et al. (2018) developed a diagnostic framework and a set of indicators for researchers interested in food systems governance practices. They identified five principles that are crucial for arrangements embracing a food system approach (therein food system

governance arrangements): system-based problem framing, boundary-spanning structures, adaptability, inclusiveness and transformative capacity. The thesis will use this framework to analyse a unique governance arrangement of the Government of Ethiopia that embraces a systems perspective to tackle malnutrition—the Seqota Declaration.

The food system outcome that is the main focus of the Seqota Declaration is food and nutrition security. As mentioned previously, food and nutrition security can be considered a wicked problem for a variety of factors, e.g. technical complexity, stakeholder involvement, boundary conflicts, and adaptation (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020). This, in return, has consequences for an effective food systems governance. Therefore, to complement the diagnostic framework, the thesis will also use the five governance capabilities proposed by Termeer et al. (2015).

Governance capabilities are "the ability of policymakers to observe wicked problems and to act accordingly, and the ability of the governance system to enable such observing and acting" (Termeer et al., 2015, p. 683.). Wicked problems cannot be solved but rather managed over time, based on observation and targeted action. Therefore, Termeer et al. (2015) argue that wicked problems need integrative approaches and different conceptual lenses and thus identified five governance capabilities to help handle them. These capabilities are reflexivity, rescaling, resilience, responsiveness, and revitalisation (Termeer et al., 2015; Termeer & Dewulf, 2014) and their presence or absence could produce or prevent progress. Termeer et al. (2015) argue that the majority of the literature on wicked problems have a narrow focus on *action* and miss two additional important dimensions: *observing* the problems and *enabling* an environment in which the problems can be handled. Therefore, the five capabilities are categorised into these three dimensions of observing, acting and enabling.

Governance principles affect governance capabilities and vice versa, as these are interlinked and mutually supportive. Each of the five capabilities seems to directly complement one of the five principles; therefore, instead of devoting a separate space for the two frameworks, the governance principles are presented in combination with their corresponding governance capabilities (see table 2.1 for visualisation).

2.3 SYNTHESIS OF FRAMEWORKS

Table 2.1. Governance principles and governance capabilities

Governance principles	Governance capabilities
System-based problem framing To deal with interlinked issues, drivers, and feedback loops	**Reflexivity** Capability to appreciate and deal with unstructured problems and multiple realities
Boundary-spanning structures To organise connectivity across boundaries of sub-systems involved	**Re-scaling** Capability to observe mismatches and to reorganise connections across different levels and scales
Adaptability To respond flexibly to inherent uncertainties and volatility in non-linear systems	Capability to flexibly adapt one's course in response to frequent and uncertain changes without losing identity
Inclusiveness To involve actors who are affected by the problem and the proposed policies	**Responsiveness** Capability to respond legitimately to unlimited demands and concerns
Transformative capacity To overcome path dependencies and create adequate conditions to foster structural change	**Revitalisation** Capability to unblock stagnations and reanimate policy processes

The first principle for food system governance arrangements is **system-based problem framing**.

To frame is

> *to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993, p. 52.).*

Through putting forward problem definitions, determining the root causes of the problem, and suggesting solutions, actors frame their own perception of reality and communicate their interpretation (Candel, Breeman, Stiller & Termeer, 2014). This sense-making process is strongly influenced by their interests and goals, and results in them emphasising certain aspects of issues and downplaying others (Candel et al. 2014). For example, Béné et al. (2019) illustrate how starting from a simple observation "our food system is failing us" one could arrive at four different narratives about these failures, each with their own set of explanations on what is behind this failure, what needs to be fixed and what kind of action is necessary. Therefore, the way an issue is defined has significant consequences for the policy cycle; according to Schnattschneider, being able to define an issue to one's advantage "is the supreme instrument of power" (Schnattschneider, 1960, p. 66).

As discussed earlier, food systems are inherently multidimensional due to their characteristics, such as their numerous interlinked and interacting sub-systems across a variety of scales and levels, involving a plethora of actors and activities. System-based problem framing promotes moving away from favouring simpler, one-dimensional, narrow problem frames towards discussing multiple potential causes behind a problem and suggesting a broad spectrum of solutions. Termeer et al. (2018) suggest that

integrating a wide variety of narratives can be enabled through governance arrangements that support deliberation and reflexivity "in which people engage to discuss tensions regarding group objectives, recognize contradictions and deal with differences in a respectful way" (Clancy, 2014, p. 4).

However, trying to accommodate a variety of perspectives and managing the different views can also be debilitating. Candel et al. (2014) identified a number of food security frames deployed by actors during the European Union Common Agricultural Policy reform debate. Food security was defined by stakeholders as a problem of insufficient food production (productionist frame); lack of free and fair trade (free trade frame); or lack of investment in small-scale farming and regional development (regional frame), among others. Their respective solution propositions were stimulating agricultural production and increasing productivity; balanced trade agreements and liberalization; and better distribution and redistribution of supportive funds towards small and middle-sized farmers (Candel et al., 2014). Whilst the European Commission acknowledged the existing frames and the multidimensional nature of food security, it was unable to relate the frames together and put forward an effective course of action. Candel et al. (2014) concluded that synthesising the narratives could help resolve the conflicting ideas and move towards forming policies. Termeer et al. (2018) also warn against frames that lack detail and depth and thus paralyse the policy process. They suggest linking the frames and creating a "jointly meaningful story that can generate guidance and commitment" (Gray, 1989, p. 86).

The related governance capability is **reflexivity** which is crucial to appreciate and handle the multiple, often conflicting frames of reality that actors put forward (Termeer et al., 2015). Reflexive observation requires actor's to consider frames beyond their own and to reflect on the consequences of framing. Reflexive action could take on three forms: persuading others to embrace a particular frame, connecting frames, reaching an agreement on a mutually beneficial option in spite of the frame differences. Reflexivity could be enabled through skills to look at alternative points of view, resources to acquire professional support for reflexive activities, and structures that foster deliberative processes among stakeholders (Termeer et al., 2015.)

The second principle for food system governance arrangements is **boundary-spanning structures.**

The aforementioned multidimensionality of food systems also raises problems for achieving connection and coordination across the multiple sub-systems; spatial, temporal and jurisdictional scales and levels; and the various public and private stakeholders (Termeer et al., 2018) that exist within and across food systems.

Termeer & Dewulf (2014) distinguish between governance scale and problem scale. The former encompasses the various levels at which formal and informal governance arrangements operate, and the latter captures the various levels a problem is able to affect. Both have spatial and temporal dimensions. Boundary conflicts emerge when stakeholders at different scales and levels are simultaneously trying to tackle the same problem, but without properly coordinating among themselves (Breeman & Ehrhardt,

2020). Further to Termeer & Dewulf (2014) and Termeer et al. (2015), Breeman & Ehrhardt (2020) elaborate on the boundary conflicts that can arise between different (parts of) organisations or stakeholders, namely policy domain conflicts, time horizon conflicts, scale conflicts and society-public governance conflicts (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020).

Policy domain conflicts: Policy domains are components "of governance systems that are organised around policy issues", such as agriculture, health, water and education (Burstein, 1991, cited in Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020, p. 145). Usually, policy domains are represented through corresponding organisations, e.g. the aforementioned domains can be represented by ministries/departments/bureaus of agriculture, health, water and education. However, many policy issues—especially wicked problems, like food security—cannot be solved by one domain but requires close cooperation and coordination across them.

Time horizon conflicts: This form of conflict emerges when the policy issue in question either has short-term and long-term consequences or demands different, often contrasting short-term and long-term solutions. For example, emergency food aid is often used to address short-term food insecurity in developing countries. However, whilst it can contribute to improved food security and hunger alleviation in the short run, the benefits can be offset by some potential long-term consequences, such as undermined domestic production, disincentivised governments and dependency among the recipients (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020).

Scale conflicts (governance level and geography): Policy issues can also cut across various geographical territories or governance levels (e.g. local, regional, national, global), making the questions of authority and responsibility difficult. Food security, for example, is defined at the global level, but it needs to be tackled at a variety of levels, ranging from the individual and household levels through community and regional levels to national and global levels.

Society-public governance conflicts: This form of conflict emerges when actors from the public sphere cooperate with private actors, such as individuals, communities and non-governmental organisations. This conflict raises a similar issue of authority and responsibility as mentioned under scale conflicts. For example, in the absence of government support (or often simultaneously with government support), a variety of stakeholders step in. Civil society organizations may set up food banks and distribute food, run food-for-work schemes, give out food stamps, and social networks could also help the most vulnerable via food sharing (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020). For best outcomes, there should be a level of coordination among the actors providing these types of food aid.

To overcome the aforementioned issues, Termeer et al. (2018) call for interactions that span across boundaries. This can look a variety of ways, such as "integrated programmes, coordination schemes, public-private partnerships, multi-stakeholder platforms, integrated participatory analysis and mutual gains processes (Termeer et al., p. 86)."

The related governance capability is **rescaling** that is policymakers' ability to observe discrepancies and to reorganise relations across various levels and scales (originally referred to as scale-sensitivity in Termeer & Dewulf, 2014, later re-named as rescaling in Candel et al. 2016). Scale-sensitive observation incorporates recognising and examining cross-level and cross-scale issues, interdependencies, fits and discrepancies, and scale-sensitive acting refers to the action strategies that address these. Tolerate the existence of multiple perspectives on governance and scales, should be open to reorganise institutions if necessary, and should be able to tolerate some "redundancy and blurred responsibilities" (Termeer & Dewulf, 2014, p. 51.).

The third principle for food system governance arrangements is **adaptability.**

Food systems "are unpredictable due to their inherent characteristics of complexity, non-linearity and feedback loops that create uncertainty around their future state" (Pereira & Ruysenaar, 2012, p. 49). The nature of food systems makes them sensitive and vulnerable to a variety of unforeseeable challenges, such as political, environmental, and socio-economic shocks and stressors (Pereira & Ruysenaar, 2012). Climate change, water stress, volatility in food prices, pandemics (e.g. Covid-19)—to name a few—have all had severe impacts on the functioning of food systems. Unfortunately, even though the stressor can sometimes be predicted, the extent to which it will impact the food system is difficult to forecast. For example, it has been widely acknowledged that climate change will increasingly have an impact, but different scenarios predict different timeframes and different intensities, which makes planning for such events quite difficult.

Therefore, food system governance arrangements need to be flexible and have a strong capacity to adapt to allow coordinated response to uncertainty (Termeer et al., 2018).

To enhance adaptability, Termeer et al. (2018) list some key strategies, such as to self-organise into more flexible networks (Pereira & Ruysenaar, 2012); enhance monitoring (Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019); experiment by learning while doing (Duncan, 2015); encourage information sharing (Koliba et al., 2016), and foster relational learning processes across scales and between communities (Sonnino, Lozano Torres, & Schneider, 2014). Many of these strategies overlap with ones named as part of the governance capability of resilience, namely learning by doing, bridging arrangements and flexible institutions (Termeer et al., 2015). Therefore, these will be elaborated per strategy and enabling condition rather than per governance principle and governance capability.

Enhance monitoring: Monitoring and evaluation can enable institutions to improve adaptability against challenging conditions. Building on Termeer et al. (2018), among others, Bortoletti & Lomax (2019) suggest for progress to be monitored on the following two levels: process and outcome. The former is to evaluate if stakeholders are improving conditions for policymaking and implementation, and the latter should assess progress towards achieving improved outcomes through a set of key performance indicators (Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019).

Self-organise into more flexible networks and encourage decentralisation: Due to the variety of social, economic and political groups involved in food system activities, successful outcomes depend not only on the coordination of efforts within a given state but also beyond the state (Jessop 2003 in Pereira & Ruysenaar 2012). Therefore, a shift from top-down governance towards self-organising units spanning across multiple scales is necessary in order to enable more flexible and diverse governance responses to change (Pereira & Ruysenaar, 2012).

Experiment by learning while doing: Learning by doing nurtures exploration and experimentation, and enables institutions to recognise challenges and adjust their practices according to emerging new dynamics and multiple contexts (Duncan, 2015).

Foster relational learning processes across scales and between communities: Relational learning advocates that stakeholders examine and question their assumptions and practices, and participate in dialogues in order to enable collaboration among diverse actors, and to help determine collective solutions to shared problems (Sonnino et al., 2014). In food systems, it is important that relational learning is fostered both vertically, i.e. across governance scales, and horizontally, i.e. between different communities (Sonnino et al., 2014).

Encourage information sharing: Information sharing among stakeholders has a variety of benefits. It can help actors discuss best practices and exchange knowledge, share experiences, scale innovations, build trust and improve collaboration and partnerships (Koliba et al., 2016).

Besides the aforementioned strategies falling under resilience, there are a few further observing, acting strategies and enabling conditions highlighted by Termeer et al. (2015). The governance capability of **resilience** refers to one's ability to adapt one's course in response to frequent and uncertain changes flexibly (Termeer et al., 2015). Resilient observation and action refer to actors ability to observe weak signals and consider unexpected challenges and design robust or flexible adaptive measures or strategies to mitigate their impact (Brugnach et al., 2008). The tolerance of high levels of redundancy could help enable such observation and action (Folke, Hahn, Olsson & Norberg, 2005).

The fourth principle for food system governance arrangements is **inclusiveness**.

Food system actors are often part of creating the problems but could also hold the key to solutions (Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019). However, many stakeholders in food systems that have high stakes in certain outcomes or may be negatively affected by certain decisions do not have an option to voice their opinion. Marginalised groups include smallholders and rural people, the youth, women, refugees and conflict-affected people, indigenous people, fishermen and other vulnerable food system workers (IFPRI, 2020, HLPE, 2020). Simultaneously, small groups of stakeholders may have a disproportionately great influence on decision-making processes (HLPE, 2020).

Including diverse food systems stakeholders in decision-making processes is crucial for not only moral (e.g. justice, fairness and equity) but also practical reasons (e.g. efficacy, accountability and legitimacy) (Biermann, 2007, Biermann et al., 2012, Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020). For example, local networks and communities (e.g. churches) may have a better understanding of the local context and circumstances than national government institutions (Termeer et al., 2018). Therefore, including them in the decision-making processes could help improve efficacy (Breeman & Ehrhardt, 2020), as they could shed light on some of the underlying issues and linkages behind food insecurity that government institutions may not be aware of or may overlook (Termeer et al., 2018).

Furthermore, civil society organisations are also the most likely to represent and help empower people and groups that are the most vulnerable and marginalised (Hospes and Brons, 2016). As for marginalised voices, including them also enhances the legitimacy of the decision-making process. People are more likely to accept decisions and reforms if they are part of the process and their voices are heard (Breeman and Ehrhardt, 2020). As such, governments should create and enhance political spaces where marginalised groups can become part of the debate. These spaces should be sensitive to social differentiation, unequal power relations and different capacities of the participants to advocate for themselves (Schut et al., 2015).

Embracing the governance capability of **responsiveness** could also help policymakers address pressing public demands whilst upholding democratic values (Termeer et al., 2015). Policymakers should be able to observe calls for attention towards political and societal issues with the help of a dedicated department and a monitoring system. When addressing diverse audiences, they should also tailor the use of their language to ensure the target audience has a good comprehension of their message. Strategies on how and when to communicate could enable them to recognise when an opportunity arises to change policies that they should seize, and also when reacting is unnecessary. Policymakers should also participate in platforms where calls for attention are made (Termeer et al., 2015).

The fifth principle for food system governance arrangements is **transformative capacity**.

To make poorly functioning food systems more inclusive, sustainable, and enable them to meet people's nutritional needs, a systemic transformation is needed (Bortoletti & Lomax, 2019). Transformative change includes:

> *shifts in perception and meaning, changes in underlying norms and values, reconfiguration of social networks and patterns of interaction, changes in power structures, and the introduction of new institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks (IPCC, 2012, p. 465).*

However, both formal and informal institutions are subject to path dependence, that is, committing to a certain way of making decisions based on past experiences and precedent, halting any possibility to undergo transformative change (Termeer et al., 2018). Whilst history and past policy choices and decisions matter in decision-making,

it can become a problem if when faced with wicked problems, actors revert to certain past patterns and strategies that may have worked within a certain context in a certain time but may not help at all with managing the wicked problem in question (Termeer et al., 2015). When such strategies are applied without their critical analysis and without interaction processes between people, policymakers risk normalising certain rules and locking them onto a certain path that is very difficult to change ((Termeer et al., 2015). It may also reinforce underlying power differences and may not consider the needs and interests of certain actors (Sehring, 2009), often the ones that are the most vulnerable and affected. In the end, actors may achieve the opposite of the desired effect and further marginalise certain groups.

Improving food systems outcomes requires governance arrangements to enhance their transformative capacity, that is, their ability to deliver radical food system transformation through challenging dominant norms, rules, power relations and vested interests and fostering an environment that enables major shifts in the way institutions operate (Termeer et al., 2018, Termeer et al., 2015). Political will and leadership will also be crucial to driving transformative change (Termeer et al., 2018).

Revitalisation is the ability of actors to steer policies and interactions away from historical pathways towards more promising directions (Termeer et al., 2015). Through careful observation, actors should be able to identify if barriers to transformative change are present. Including qualified, external actors ('third eyes') in the observation processes and determining archetypes of system behaviour for the food system could help deepen the quality of the observation and help recognise systemic barriers. Actors should also be working actively towards preventing and unblocking stagnation through nurturing constructive interactions among stakeholders and fostering healthy confrontation. To enable observing the need for and action for revitalisation, actors should be willing to step out of their comfort zone, appreciate the value of conflict and challenge conflict aversion, and should not refrain from involving third eyes (Termeer et al., 2015).

The combination and integration of these two frameworks were used in order to collect information that could enable the identification of critical challenges for the Seqota Declaration initiative from a food systems governance perspective. The extent to which the five governance principles were present was determined to help identify the successes and limitations of the initiative. The extent to which the five governance capabilities were present was assessed in order to establish what strategies and enabling conditions made the governance successes possible, if any, or how their limited or heightened application hindered progress. Overall, the combination of these two frameworks enabled the acquisition of a rich picture of the successes achieved and challenges faced by the Seqota Declaration initiative from a food systems governance perspective.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 LITERATURE AND DOCUMENT REVIEW

First of all, secondary data was collected through a review of the literature and policy documents on nutrition challenges and policies in Ethiopia relevant to the Seqota Declaration through desk research. This helped establish a better picture and understanding of the goals and initiatives of the Declaration, the governance structure in place, the main stakeholders involved and the progress made so far.

The five principles framework and the governance capabilities framework were then used to diagnose the Seqota Declaration from a food systems governance perspective and to explore the extent to which governance capabilities necessary for achieving progress during the implementation of the initiative are present. To this end, a set of guiding questions have been drafted based on the indicators presented in Termeer et al. (2015, 2018), Termeer & Dewulf (2014), and Broto, Trencher, Iwaszuk & Westman (2019), and some questions have also been lifted from Bortoletti & Lomax (2019). See Appendix 1 for the full list of questions.

The analysis was based on a variety of data present in policy documents (e.g. the National Nutrition Programme II); published program plans (e.g. the Seqota Declaration Implementation Plan, The Seqota Declaration Innovation Phase Investment Plan); internal program evaluation documents—courtesy of the Federal Programme Delivery Unit (e.g. Seqota Declaration Baseline Assessment Report and the related documents on financial tracking, gender mainstreaming, multi-stakeholder coordination and partnership management and advocacy guideline, and the annual performance report), and other peer-reviewed and grey literature (e.g. working papers) as adequate.

3.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Once a more detailed picture was established on the extent to which the Seqota Declaration adopts food systems governance principles and embrace governance capabilities, primary data was collected to complement the knowledge gained during the document review. This took the form of qualitative interviews with stakeholders involved in the initiative.

Potential respondents were identified through purposive sampling that was based on assumptions of their knowledge and experience within the initiative, but the selection process was sometimes constricted by their accessibility. When the identified respondents were not available or not at the best place to answer the interview questions, snowball sampling was used with their help and guidance. Whilst data saturation was seemingly achieved after the first 10 to 12 interviews, in order to ensure no new information was coming to light, a total of 15 interviews were carried out. The interviews were anonymous, and thus the identity of the interviewees will not be disclosed, only their institutions. In the report, interviewees are referred to as Respondent # or R#. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the respondents.

Table 3.1 Interviewees

Institution	Sector
Federal level	
Seqota Declaration Federal Program Delivery Unit (x2)	Public sector
Ministry of Health (MoH)	Public sector
Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy (MoWIE)	Public sector
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)	Public sector
Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI)	Public sector
Big Win Philanthropy (x2)	Third sector
CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	Third sector
Save the Children International	Third sector
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)	Third sector
Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)	Third sector
Sub-national level	
Seqota Declaration Tigray Regional Program Delivery Unit (RPDU)	Public sector
CultivAid	Third sector
ThinkPlace	Third sector

The interview guide (Appendix 2) focused on the parts of the framework that have not been answered by the document review or that need further elaboration or confirmation. It contained semi-structured questions in order to capture a wide range of experiences and views. The purpose of the guide was to provide some structure for the interviewer and the interviewees and guide towards addressing important components but was used loosely and the questions were tailored to the roles and perceived knowledge of the respondents during the interview.

Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were sent some information on the research along with the interview guide. Due to the coronavirus crisis, the interviews were carried out online, through a platform of preference on the interviewees' side. With the consent of the respondents, the interviews were recorded and then were transcribed clean verbatim. The transcriptions were shared with the interviewees to provide them with an opportunity to provide feedback, confirm their thoughts have been captured accurately, and omit sections they did not want to be part of the final transcript[1]. The data collected was then organised and analysed according to the frameworks and themes emerging from the responses. This was followed by analysis and synthesis.

[1] This last opportunity was only used by a few respondents to remove issues that have been mentioned off the record.

4 SETTING THE SCENE

4.1 THE ETHIOPIAN FOOD SYSTEM

The Ethiopian food system has been rapidly transforming from a traditional system into a transitional system, which evolution is also reflected in the three elements of the Ethiopian food system—the food environment, consumer behaviour and supply chains—and in the population's diet (Minten, Dereje, Bachewe & Tamru, 2018). This transformation is driven by demographic trends, such as rapid population growth and urbanisation, economic trends such as growing incomes, and infrastructure trends, such as investments in infrastructure (Minten et al., 2018). The following section will outline the general trends and challenges prevalent in the Ethiopian food system; first considering diet quality, then the constituent elements and outcomes of the food system and finally, the main drivers.

4.1.1 DIET QUALITY

Ethiopians' energy intake has been increasing, and whilst starchy staples are still the most important source of energy intake, their consumption has been decreasing, and the consumption of different types of products, such as meat and dairy and fruits and vegetables, has been increasing (Minten et al., 2018). However, dietary diversity remains extremely low, and there is high dependence on starchy staples across the country (Gebru et al., 2018). Furthermore, the consumption of fruits, vegetables and quality protein also remains limited (Gebru et al., 2018). On the other hand, salt consumption is alarmingly high across the country (Baye & Hirvonen, 2020). Also, whilst the consumption of ultra-processed food is still low in Ethiopia, it is on the rise, especially in urban areas (Gebru et al., 2018). Vitamin A and zinc intake among adult women is insufficient to address their needs, leading to deficiencies and potentially contributing to the high levels of anaemia among women and children. Foodborne pathogens are also a public health concern, as they often lead to illness and death (Gebru et al., 2018)

Diets differ significantly between urban and rural households, and between lower-income and higher-income households, for example, in the amount of animal products, types of cereal they consume (Minten et al., 2018). The changing distribution of the population due to the trend of increasing urbanisation indicates that urban dietary preferences may attain an increasingly important role in shaping Ethiopia's food system (Minten et al., 2018).

4.1.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The most important factors influencing consumer behaviour in Ethiopia are culture, religion, and local production. Still, more in-depth research is required to asses the extent to and way in which these and other factors affect consumer choice (Gebru et al., 2018). As for consumer purchasing power, a number of trends can be distinguished: (i) percentage of total expenditure spent on food is decreasing, (ii) the amount of food consumed is rising, (iii) spending on starchy staple products is declining, and spending on other food products is increasing, (iv) starchy staple products account for the

majority of energy intake, (v) the food expenditure habits of urban and rural households differ significantly (Gebru et al., 2018).

4.1.3 FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Although naturally the urban population is more dependent on agricultural commercialisation than the rural households, the latter also needs commercial food markets to purchase food for consumption (Minten et al., 2018). Whilst rural market integration is still somewhat lacking and needs further improvement (Hirvonen & Hoddinott, 2017), the overall functioning of markets has improved over the last two decades and is expected to develop further (Minten et al., 2018). Prices for staple crops have not shown much increase, whilst the prices of oils, fats and sugar decreased (Bachewe et al. 2017). On the other hand, the significantly increasing prices of nutrient-dense foods (Bachewe et al., 2017) make these products unaffordable for low-income households. There has been an increasing amount of promotion activities around the consumption of healthier food as part of the nutrition efforts in the country—such as social and behavioural change communication interventions—but without addressing the question of affordability, they may have a lesser impact.

4.1.4 VALUE CHAINS

A number of changes can also be observed across the different stages of the Ethiopian value chains. Agricultural production has welcomed substantial growth as a result of a combination of intensifications and modernisation (Minten et al. 2020). Particularly the production of starchy staples has increased, but the other food groups have not seen much change (Gebru et al. 2018). With the agricultural sector embracing the country's nutrition efforts, nutrition-sensitive practices have been increasingly promoted. This includes a renewed focus on increasing vegetable, fruit and livestock production (MoA, 2016). Whilst there has been an increase in commercial farmers, their long-term role is uncertain, and the country is still primarily dominated by smallholder farms (Minten et al., 2020). However, due to increasing pressure on the land, the average farm size of smallholders dropped below one hectare, 50% of which is less than 0.65 hectare (Tafesse, 2019). With decreasing access to land and fewer opportunities for the youth in agriculture, the average age of farmers is also on the rise. The scarcity of land also led to the emergence of land rental markets (Minten et al., 2020).

International trade is dominated by cereal import and the export of coffee, oil crops, pulses and vegetables (Gebru et al., 2018). The national agricultural trade and transport sector has demonstrated considerable growth (Minten et al., 2020), with efforts to enabling longer value chains for certain commodities (Gebru et al., 2018). However, limitations across the other stages of the value chain, such as storage and processing, and other limitations, such as topography, imposed a constraint on the extent to which transport could flourish (Gebru et al., 2018). The food processing sectors also saw significant changes, especially the dairy processing subsector, where the amount of companies has more than tripled between 2007 and 2017 and the milling subsector, which has seen an increase in the number of mills across urban areas (Minten et al., 2020). The food service sector has also been fast expanding, with enjera-making or retailing facilities providing employment for more than 100,000 people in urban areas.

Private sector retailing establishments and food distribution are on the rise, but their amount and significance are still low (Minten et al., 2020).

4.1.5 FOOD SYSTEM OUTCOMES

The aforementioned transformations in the Ethiopian food system create a variety of nutrition, health, socioeconomic and environmental outcomes.

Nutrition and health outcomes

Ethiopia has made considerable progress over the last 20 years in addressing maternal and child nutrition in Ethiopia, which is reflected in the anthropometric nutrition indicators it uses to assess the nutritional status of children under five, namely stunting (height-for-age), wasting (weight-for-height) and underweight (weight-for-age). Between 2005 and 2019, the prevalence of stunting reduced from 51% to 37%, the prevalence of wasting reduced from 12% to 7%, and the proportion of underweight children decreased from 33% to 21% (EMDHS, 2019). However, with 1 in 3 children under the age of five stunted, 12% of which severely stunted, undernutrition—and stunting in particular—remains on the top of the country's political agenda. Non-communicable diseases have been increasing, and whilst obesity is not prevalent, the numbers have been increasing and are expected to continue to increase (Trübswasser, Genye, Bossuyt, 2020).

Socioeconomic outcomes

Whilst Ethiopia's economy has been undergoing spatial and structural transformation, agricultural production has also grown substantially, and agriculture remains an important source of income and employment for a number of people, especially smallholders who rely more on subsistence farming (Dorosh et al., 2020). The agricultural sector generates between 65% (World Bank estimate) and 85% (FAO estimate) of total employment in Ethiopia (Woolfrey et al., 2021). According to a World Bank poverty assessment (World Bank, 2014), the rapid growth experienced by the Ethiopian agriculture sector has significantly contributed to poverty reduction. Reliance on agricultural imports, especially that of palm oil, sugar and rice, has significantly increased over the past two decades (Woolfrey et al., 2021). Whilst the country's export has also increased, it is not comparable to the amount it imports. The imbalance between the export and import often results in foreign exchange shortages (Woolfrey et al., 2021). Dorosh et al. (2020) estimate that regardless of the increased urbanisation of the Ethiopian population, the least wealthy will continue residing in rural areas and being dependent on agricultural activities for the unforeseeable future. Thus, agricultural processes will continue to play a key role in poverty alleviation in Ethiopia (Dorosh et al., 2020). As for gender and youth consideration, female-headed farmer households have less access to resources than male-headed ones, and the youth have decreasing opportunities in rural areas, which leads to increasing migration (Woolfrey et al. 2021).

The continued prevalence of undernutrition due to inadequate diets has had a major negative impact on the country's economic growth. The Cost of Hunger in Africa report (EPHI-AU, 2013) estimates that in 2009 the country lost an equivalent to 16.5% of its

GDP of the year due to undernutrition, and if no action is taken, the number could increase greatly over time.

In Ethiopia, the most significant political concern currently is related to stunting. As mentioned previously, 1 in 3 children under the age of five is stunted. Socioeconomic inequality often underlies stunting; there are observed differences in the distribution of stunting depending on geography, the education status of the mother and the wealth status of the household (EMDHS, 2019). On the other hand, stunting can also affect the future socioeconomic status of children as it affects their physical and mental development and can cause irreversible damage (McGregor et al., 2007). As a result, it can have adverse impacts on any given area of a person's life, from school performance potentially resulting in leaving the education system at an earlier stage through earning lower wages to reinforcing the poverty cycle in the next generation (McGregor et al., 2007).

Environmental outcomes

The agricultural expansion that has had a positive impact on the country's economy had a negative impact on the environmental outcomes of the Ethiopian food system (Woolfrey et al., 2021). The increased usage of agrochemicals, agriculture-driven deforestation, water pollution and excessive grazing practices resulted in decreased biodiversity and the loss of ecosystem services. The agriculture-driven deforestation reduced the carbon capture capability of the soil and contributed to soil erosion. Intensive agricultural practices have also put pressure on water availability. Whilst Ethiopia's per capita emissions is among the lowest in the world, agriculture is accountable for the vast majority of those emissions (Woolfrey et al., 2021).

4.1.6 FOOD SYSTEM DRIVERS

The food system elements and outcomes are influenced by a wide range of different food system drivers. These drivers also influence the food system and its outcomes.

Biophysical and environmental drivers

Ethiopia has a very variable topography that made road construction challenging and had a negative impact on connectivity in rural areas (Schmidt & Thomas, 2018). It also encompasses a wide variety of agroecological zones that has an impact on the variety of crop and livestock that can be produced in different areas. The agricultural production of Ethiopia is mostly rain-fed; thus, it depends on the continuity of rainfall. With the average annual rainfall on the decline and rising temperatures (Abebe, 2017), the impact of climate change is being felt. There has also been a resurgence of pests, such as the recent locust infestation that has had an effect on agricultural yields.

Innovation, technology and infrastructure drivers

Recent investments in road construction have developed connectivity for the country's population. However, connectivity in rural areas is still lacking, isolating some of the most vulnerable segments of the population from accessing markets (Schmidt & Thomas, 2018). The water infrastructure is also lacking as only approximately 5% of irrigable land is currently irrigated, resulting in the dependence on rainfed agriculture

(Asrat & Anteneh, 2019). Dorosh et al. (2020) note the emergence of three important innovations in supply chains, namely modern commodity exchange, contract farming, and mobile phones, albeit with varied consequences for value chain performance. Nevertheless, the increasing access of agricultural workers to mobile phones, for example, opens up new opportunities for agricultural trade and climate information services (Minten et al., 2018).

Economic and market drivers

As mentioned previously, Ethiopia has experienced significant economic growth over the past two decades and is aspiring to reach lower-middle-income status by 2025. However, the country does not have a large export of goods, and as a result, suffers from a trade deficit (Woolfrey et al., 2021). The regulations the government imposes to oversee foreign exchange negatively impacts the ability of businesses to import (Woolfrey et al., 2021). The rural youth are faced with challenges when wishing to enter paid labour due to a number of constraints, namely "insufficient capital or credit or both, information asymmetries of markets and input supplies, and lack of education and skills" (Dorosh & Minten, 2020).

Political and institutional drivers

All land in the country is owned by the state. Whilst the government has established some procedures to improve the tenure system, many young people struggle to have access to land, and land size is also decreasing (Dorosh & Minten, 2020). The country encompasses a wide variety of ethnicities and has suffered from recurrent inter-ethnic conflict. At the end of 2020, the escalating tensions between the federal state and the Tigray region resulted in armed conflict. The conflict is still ongoing and has had a major impact on the population in the area, as thousands have been killed and millions had to migrate or became displaced (WPF, 2021). The food security consequences are also dire, and there are warning about a serious risk of famine (WPF, 2021).

Socio-cultural drivers

The country is characterised by low human development, with many people lacking higher levels of education (Woolfrey et al., 2021). Gender inequality remains a significant issue, with women having lower levels of education and access to resources—such as credits, agricultural inputs and land—than men (Woolfrey et al., 2021).

Demographic drivers

As a result of rapid population growth, the country is currently experiencing a "youth bulge" (Dorosh & Minten, 2020). This "demographic dividend" could improve the labour force for the country for the unforeseeable future, as long as youth is given the opportunity to work (Dorosh & Minten, 2020). However, due to the youth's inability to acquire land, many have migrated to urban areas, driving urbanisation (Minten et al., 2018).

4.2 POLICY ENVIRONMENT IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has come a long way from ad hoc, reactive interventions addressing recurring food crises situations to more preventative and holistic approaches towards malnutrition (Trübswasser et al., 2020; Fan et al., 2019; Ayele et al., 2020; Mokoro, 2015). A recent review of Ethiopian nutrition policies found that Ethiopia currently has a very rich nutrition policy landscape (Trübswasser et al., 2020). Ayele et al. (2020) distinguish three eras of nutrition politics and policy practice in Ethiopia. They argue that the first era was characterised by ad hoc and reactive responses to disasters (1960s and 1970s), the second by the emergence of community projects (1980s and 1990s) and the third by the move towards multi-sector nutrition policy design and implementation (2000+).

With the shifting focus in nutrition efforts, a shift in the main narratives could also be seen: whilst in the first and second era the focus was more on food security (and specifically food production), in the third era, nutrition has entered the stage, and the main narrative became food and nutrition security (Ayele et al., 2020). One of the factors that led to the shifting narrative in the mid-2000s was a realisation that food surplus and agricultural productivity alone were not sufficient to address the prevalence of malnutrition, as despite a number of food security interventions, malnutrition remained high (Trübswasser et al., 2020). The influential report on the economic cost of stunting (AU-EPHI-COHA) and the realisation of how much GDP the country is losing on an annual basis due to stunting can also be viewed as one of the game-changers for policymakers and is echoed in many of the key policy documents.

Ethiopia's nutrition programmes are driven by evidence from surveys and research studies largely produced by Ethiopian government agencies (Trübswasser et al., 2020), but were also influenced by findings of the 2008 and 2013 Lancet series on Maternal and Child Nutrition (Trübswasser et al., 2020.) and global movements and declarations, such as the Maputo Declaration, the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) movement, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (FDRE, 2016a).

The overarching multi-sectoral nutrition programmes in Ethiopia have been the National Nutrition Program I (NNP I, 2008-2015) and the National Nutrition Program II (NNP II, 2016-2020). The Seqota Declaration initiative supports the implementation of multi-sectoral nutrition efforts in the country, and the Food and Nutrition Policy passed in 2018 provides a legal framework to improve nutrition in the country. The National Nutrition Strategy (2008) and the NNP I seemingly represented the first step towards achieving an integrated multi-sectoral approach to nutrition. The latter aimed to promote nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions through an integrated and coordinated approach (FDRE, 2016a). Unfortunately, the programme did not succeed in achieving effective multisectoral coordination. As a result, the subsequent NNP II aimed to address the shortcomings of NNP II through increased collaboration and mainstreaming nutrition into the different sectoral activities (FDRE, 2016a).

The Seqota Declaration emerged in 2015 to further emphasise and nurture the prevalent high-level political commitment to nutrition (FDRE, 2018b) and to accelerate a multisectoral approach to achieve the elimination of stunting in children under two by

2030. Another driving reason behind the inception of the initiative was the acknowledgement that even though numerous interventions have been attempted over the previous two decades, the results were mixed, and undernutrition remained a problem (FDRE, 2016b). The GoE recognised that to tackle a complex problem, such as child malnutrition, there is a need for an "extraordinary approach" that is "systemic, creative and participative" (FDRE, 2016b, p. 4.). As such, the initiative aims to combine high impact nutrition-specific and nutrition-smart interventions with economic and infrastructure development delivered through integrated interventions (FDRE, 2016b). There is a strong emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration between and within the implementing sectors, development partners and civil society actors; and special attention is paid to social behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategies, along with cross-cutting issues, such as gender mainstreaming, the environment and integrated community development approach (FDRE, 2018b).

To provide a legal and institutional framework for "national nutrition planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination in the country" (FDRE, 2018a, p. 22) and address accountability issues, the National Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP) was passed in 2018. New measures based on the policy will include the establishment of a new governance structure in order to replace the existing NNP I and NNP II structures (FDRE, 2018a). The policy also reiterates the government's commitment to addressing malnutrition and ending stunting. A new Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) is currently under development in order to operationalise the FNP (R7).

Besides the more overarching nutrition programmes, nutrition has also been increasingly mainstreamed into the different sectoral policies, albeit somewhat limited to the health, agriculture and the education sector (Trübswasser et al., 2020). The agriculture sector mainstreamed nutrition as part of the Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture Strategy 2016-2020 (NSAS), the Agricultural Growth Program II 2015-2020 (AGP II), the Productive Safety Net Programme IV 2014 (PSNP IV), the National Horticulture Development and Marketing Strategy 2017, and the Livestock Master Plan 2015. The education sector mainstreamed nutrition as part of the Education Sector Development Program V (2015), National School Health and Nutrition Strategy (2017), and its school-based programmes (Trübswasser et al., 2020).

4.3 NUTRITION GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

This section will focus on the current national nutrition governance structure, given that the stakeholders implementing the first phase of the Seqota Declaration interacted with these structures. The Seqota Declaration specific governance mechanisms will be explored in the analysis section.

Ethiopia is a federal democracy, with a federal government at the national level. The sub-national public administration has four tiers, namely regions, zones, woredas (districts) and kebeles (cluster of villages). The highest level of authority at each level are the Prime Minister, Regional State President, Zonal Administrator, Woreda Administrator and Kebele Administrator, respectively. Decision-making is relatively decentralised as the ten regions hold a degree of autonomy as they are able to exercise certain legislative, judicial and executive powers (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019), but

they do depend on the federal government for resources (Warren & Frongillo, 2017). Furthermore, the federal government also has authority over national defence, foreign affairs and national policies (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019). The majority of the nutrition implementation is carried out at the woreda and kebele levels (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019). The distribution of power and influence necessitates strong nutrition coordination mechanisms across all the levels, with a special focus on the sub-national governance.

In order to enhance nutrition coordination and linkages across the implementing sectors of the National Nutrition Program at the different levels, the GoE established an implementation platform during NNP I, namely the Nutrition Coordinating Body (NCB), and its technical arm, the Nutrition Technical Committee (NTC) at federal level cascading down to the kebele level (FDRE, 2016a; FDRE, 2016b). According to the NNP II, through these platforms, interventions related to nutrition were supposed to be "integrated, coordinated and mainstreamed into the various national development sectors" (FDRE, 2016a, page 17). The programme is also supported by three sub-committees, namely the Nutrition Program Coordination Sub-Committee chaired by the MoH, the Nutrition Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Sub-Committee chaired by the EPHI and the Food Fortification Program Sub-Committee chaired by the Ministry of Industry (FDRE, 2016a). The relationship between these structures is represented in Figure 4.1.

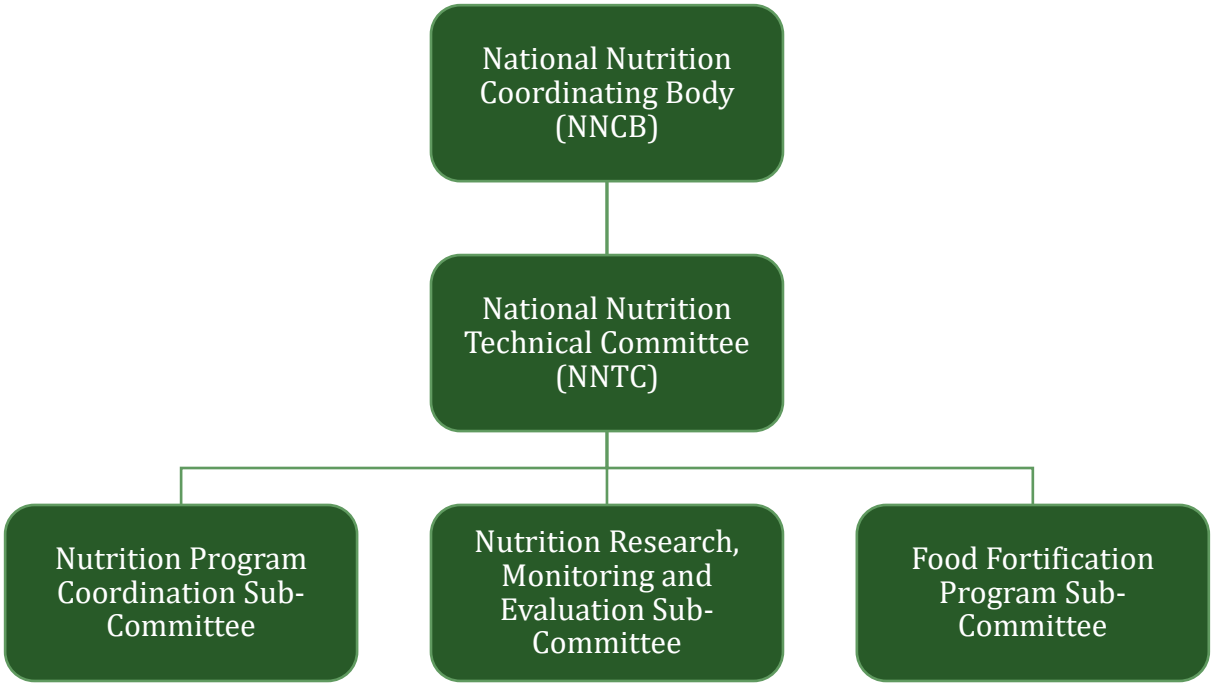

Figure 4.1. National nutrition governance structure. Source: author's own based on FDRE, 2016a

The National NCB (NNCB) is the highest level nutrition governing body and was designed to make decisions in relation to NNP policies and strategies, oversee budget considerations for the implementation of the NNP, and provide guidance, among others (FDRE, 2016a, 2016b). It aims to bring together representatives from the respective

government sectors, such as state ministers, and representatives from donor organisations, nutrition development partners, the academia and the private sector (FDRE, 2016a, 2016b). The NNCB is chaired by the Ministry of Health, and co-chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education and is administratively supported by the Maternal and Child Health Directorate (FDRE, 2016a). See figure 4.2 for the visual representation of the structure.

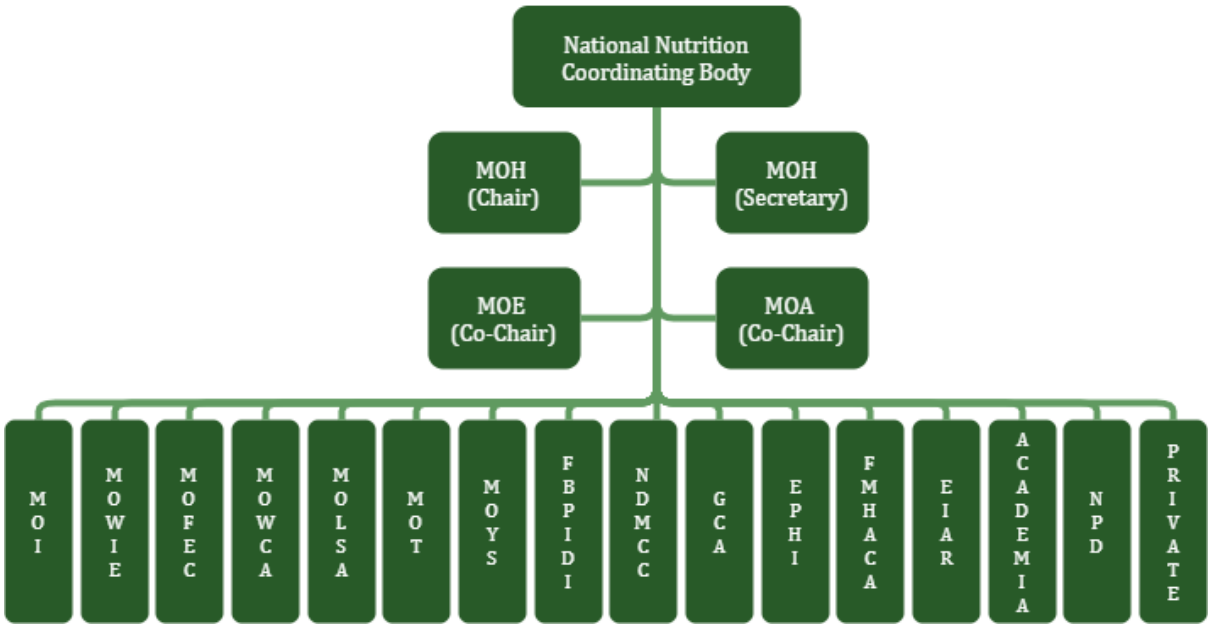

Figure 4.2. Structure of the National Nutrition Coordinating Body. Source: Author's own based on FDRE, 2016a and FDRE, 2016b

The National NTC (NNTC) was established as a technical advisor to the NNCB and aims to bring together technical personnel and directors from relevant directorates within the NNP implementing ministries, and representatives from donor organisations, nutrition development partners, the academia and the private sector (FDRE, 2016a). Similarly to the NNCB, the NNTC is also chaired by the MoH, and co-chaired by MoA and MoE (FDRE, 2016a).

The corresponding structures on the sub-national level are the Regional Nutrition Coordination Body (regional level), Zonal Nutrition Coordination Body (zonal level), Woreda Nutrition Coordination Body (woreda level), Nutrition Coordination Office (kebele) and are supported by the corresponding technical committees.

However, in the years of NNP I, the platforms did not deliver the aspired results as they were ineffective due to issues stemming from the lack of clarity about responsibilities, accountability and authority; lack of guidelines, reporting mechanisms, and commitment crucial to supporting the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme; and due to lack of efficient sectoral organisational structures (FDRE, 2016a). Therefore, NNP II and the Seqota Declaration both committed to making multi-stakeholder nutrition coordination and leveraging these platforms and their

subnational level counterparts a pivotal part of their strategic objectives and implementation.

Whilst the National Nutrition Strategy for 2021 onwards and the corresponding "lessons learnt" from the implementation of NNP II are not publicly available yet, a more recent study on Ethiopia's nutrition governance (Ayele et al. 2020b) shows signs that the goals outlined in NNP II regarding multi-sectoral coordination have not yet been achieved. The study highlighted limitations in four critical areas that need to be addressed, such as:

1) *ineffective multi-sectoral nutrition coordination, due to lack of accountability and ownership, perception of bias, and narrow perspectives and limited resources;*
2) *low policy priority of multi-sectoral nutrition programme implementation;*
3) *low investment in nutrition programmes; and*
4) *lack of consensus on internal (i.e. bureaucrats) and external (i.e. donors) framing of food and nutrition security (Ayele et al. 2020a).*

According to the conclusions of the study, "multi-sectoral nutrition coordination was largely inefficient, and there were excessive delays in translating nutrition policy into action and outcomes" (Ayele et al. 2020b. p. 39). On the other hand, a World Bank assessment (2019) notes that despite the shortcomings of the NCB in its early stages of development, its performance improved over time, and it rated the overall governance performance as "moderately satisfactory" (World Bank, 2019, p. 38). In order to address some of the underlying issues that have been impeding progress, the national nutrition governance structures are expected to undergo significant structural changes and a rebranding in the coming years.

The new structure would encompass a Food and Nutrition Council (FNC) along with the Food and Nutrition Agency at the federal level, with similar structures to be replicated at regional, zonal, woreda and kebele levels (R14). The Food and Nutrition Councils will replace the Nutrition Coordination Bodies across the levels. The federal FNC is designated to be the "governing body responsible for food and nutrition policy implementation and providing leadership and guidance for Seqota Declaration" (FDRE, 2018b, p. 26). The regional FNCs would similarly be responsible for implementing the Food and Nutrition Policy with a strong focus on the Seqota Declaration activities and would be led by the Regional Presidents. They are also supposed to oversee the establishment of similar structures at lower administrative levels. At the zonal, woreda and kebele level, FNCs are expected to be led by the respective zonal, woreda and kebele administrators (FDRE, 2018). The agency is expected to provide technical support to the sectors whilst the three technical committees are expected to support both the Council and the Agency (R14). A significant adjustment to the platform is that the federal FNC would be managed under the office of the Prime Minister and led by the Deputy Prime Minister in order to relieve the Ministry of Health of the responsibility of overseeing the work of the other sectors and with the hope of improving shared responsibilities and accountability (R14; FDRE, 2018b).

4.4 THE SEQOTA DECLARATION

4.4.1 FOCUS

As established previously, whilst the country has made considerable progress in reducing undernutrition, undernutrition in general—and stunting in particular—remains alarmingly high, and there is also significant variation in its distribution across the country, with some areas affected significantly more than others (FDRE, 2018b). The level of stunting is particularly concerning in light of the human development of the country and could have a negative impact on the country's goal of becoming a lower-middle-income country by 2025 (FDRE, 2018b). This positioned stunting at the centre of nutrition attention and is also the core focus of the Seqota Declaration initiative.

4.4.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The implementation roadmap of the initiative is planned for a period of 15 years and is divided into three phases: innovation phase (2016–2020), expansion phase (2021–2025) and national scale-up phase (2026–2030). The *innovation phase* is a learning phase during which interventions are implemented, monitored and evaluated, and best practices that could be scaled out are identified. The *expansion phase* aims to increase the reach of the initiative to support more vulnerable communities through the application of best practices identified during the previous phase. The *national scale-up phase* incorporates the wide-scale implementation of multisectoral action (FDRE, 2018b).

Figure 4.4 Seqota Declaration 15 year roadmap

The innovation phase started off with a preparation phase, followed by the actual implementation, and covered 40 woredas across the Tekeze River Basin, 27 in Amhara Region and 13 in Tigray Region (R15). The geographic selection was based on the recurring food insecurity and high prevalence of stunting in the areas (FDRE, 2018b). The selected Amhara woredas are characterised by a heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry, and the prevalence of stunting is over 50%. Both the selected Tigray and Amhara woredas are characterised by low agricultural productivity due to land degradation, low soil fertility and deforestation. This is coupled with the

high prevalence of diseases, and lack of access to social services due to a challenging topography led to the prevalence of stunting remaining over 50% (FDRE, 2018b, R13).

The expansion phase is expected to cover a total of 700 woredas across the ten regions and two city administrations in the country (R13). The expansion phase investment plan is underway (R13).

4.4.3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTING SECTORS

The initiative set out to achieve eight key goals (FDRE, 2016b) that were then translated into ten strategic objectives (table 4.1) with 50 strategic initiatives (FDRE, 2018b). The initiatives are listed under Appendix 3. Through a common planning framework, federal ministries, regional bureaus, development partners and technical partners contribute resources to the implementation of the SOs and SIs (FDRE, 2018b).

Table 4.1 Ten strategic objectives of the Seqota Declaration

1. *Improve the health and nutritional status of women, children under two and adolescent girls*
2. *Ensure 100% access to adequate food all year round*
3. *Transform smallholder productivity and income*
4. *Ensure zero post-harvest food loss*
5. *Enhance innovation around promotion of sustainable food systems (climate-smart agriculture)*
6. *Ensure universal access to water supply, sanitation and adoption of good hygiene practices*
7. *Improve health and nutritional status of school children*
8. *Improve nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women and children through Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) interventions*
9. *Improve gender equity, women's empowerment and child protection*
10. *Improve multi-sectoral coordination and capacity*

The initiative is currently implemented by six government sectors. Although three new ministries—namely the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Culture and Tourism—have since been added (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019f), their roles and responsibilities have not been articulated yet. The six implementing sectors are as follows:

1. *Ministry of Health (MoH)*
2. *Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)*
3. *Ministry of Water, Irrigation & Energy (MoWIE)*
4. *Ministry of Education (MoE)*
5. *Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs (MoLSA)*
6. *Ministry of Women & Children's Affairs (MoWCA)*

4.4.4 INNOVATIONS

Phase 1 also included the piloting of six innovative approaches (FDRE, 2016b; FDRE, 2018b): i) Community Labs; ii) Program Delivery Units; iii) Agricultural Innovation and

Technology Centers; iv) first 1,000 days plus public movement; v) costed woreda-based plan; and vi) data revolution.

Community Labs

As discussed previously, multi-sectoral coordination has been a key component of nutrition efforts in Ethiopia but has had its limitations. The Community Lab innovation of the Seqota Declaration initiative is the embodiment of the notion of multi-sectoral coordination and problem-solving at the local level (Community Lab Toolkit, 2019), where implementation takes place. The model builds on the understanding that communities are the ones who are most affected by the high levels of malnutrition and thus are best situated to solve the problem (Community Lab Toolkit, 2019). Community Labs aim to bring together a diverse set of stakeholders at the woreda and kebele level, such as administrators, school principals, religious leaders, healthcare workers, farmers, lay community members, etc. (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019b).

Community Labs are based on the values of "empowering local people, creative thinking, collaboration and experimentation" (Community Lab Toolkit, 2019, p. 115). Their aim is to foster collaborative action in the identification of innovations that may tackle aspects of food and nutrition insecurity and in testing them through existing systems and resources. The innovations that prove to be impactful are then expected to be scaled up during phase 2 and phase 3 of the initiative (FDRE, 2016b).

Community Labs promote learning by doing, empathy and active listening, unbiased problem definition and reflection (Community Lab Toolkit, 2019). Community Lab meetings ideally occur every month. Learning Journeys and open days are supposed to occur every other quarter, thus each twice a year. Learning Journeys are a full-day exercise where Community Lab members visit key locations in selected kebeles, gather new learnings, and identify problems to tackle, and also best practices. Open days are "kebele-led expos" where Community Lab champions share best practices. Woreda staff and community members are invited to visit the kebele to observe solutions found to problems and celebrate progress (Community Lab Toolkit, 2019).

Some successful nutrition-smart interventions as a result of Community Lab processes include the establishment of home gardens and nutrition clubs, the introduction of nutritious school meals, trainings on keyhole gardens and the nutritional value of goat milk for young children, and training and cooking demonstration on the nutritional value of pumpkin (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019b).

Program Delivery Units

The Program Delivery Units (PDUs) are one of the key and probably most advanced innovations of the Seqota Declaration initiative. The innovation was developed in order to address the constant challenges around multi-sectoral coordination and implementation (FDRE, 2018b). The PDUs provide technical leadership, enable the coordination of the Seqota Declaration as a whole and foster coordination between the implementing sectors and among key stakeholders. Besides facilitating coordination and engagement, PDUs are also responsible for performance management and resource mobilisation (FDRE, 2018b).

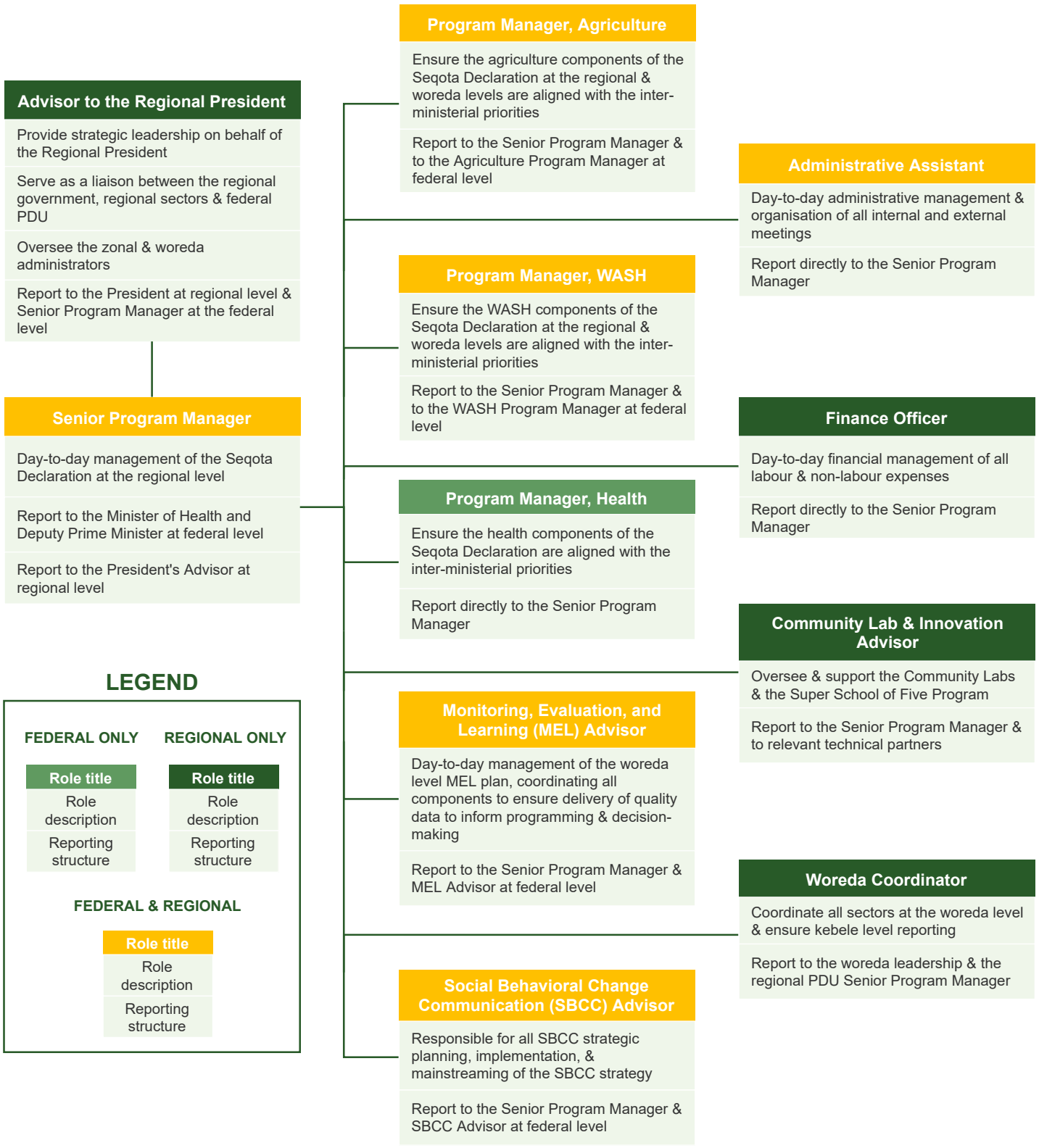

Figure 4.5 Roles and responsibilities of the Seqota Declaration Program Delivery Units. Source: Author's adaptation based on FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019f

In the innovation phase, three Program Delivery Units were established, one at the federal level (FPDU) and two at the regional level (RPDU) in Amhara and Tigray regions (FDRE, 2018b). There is also a PDU "footprint" at the woreda level, namely the Woreda Coordinator. The FPDU is currently based at the Ministry of Health and reports to the Deputy Prime Minister. The RPDUs are based at the Regional Presidents' office and report to the Regional Presidents (FDRE, 2018b). The Woreda Coordinator reports to the woreda leadership (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019f). The Program Delivery Units are staffed by small teams of experts who have technical expertise from a wide range of areas crucial for the Seqota Declaration implementation, such as agriculture, WASH, health, finance etc. For the detailed setup of the Program Delivery Units, please consult figure 4.5 above.

First 1,000 days plus public movement

This is a community-based approach to tracking stunting progression at seven critical periods during the first 1,000 days of life and thereafter, identifying and initiating critical actions for stunting prevention (FDRE, 2018b). To include all the relevant actors at the different stages, the 1,000 days period has been broadened to 1,000 days plus to cover the preconception phase; thus including adolescents in school and mothers before pregnancy. The first 1,000 days plus public movement builds on the social behaviour change communication (SBCC) and targets broad community engagement to address negative sociocultural and traditional practices in relation to diet, hygiene, health-seeking and other factors that predispose to undernutrition. Interventions aim to be culturally appropriate and focus on exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, dietary diversity, anti-fasting practices, involvement of males, improving household level gardening practices (FDRE, 2018b).

Some of the achievements up to date include the development of the first 1,000 days plus public movement plan; establishment of communication and public relations network, media engagement; utilisation of champions, influential leaders and religious leaders; mobilisation of community extension workers and community-based networks; and developing a social and behaviour change mainstreaming guideline (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019e).

Agricultural Innovation and Technology Centers

Agricultural Innovation and Technology Centers (AITECs) are 20-hectare farms where the piloting and demonstration of agricultural innovations and improved technologies, farmer training and knowledge transfer could take place (FDRE, 2018b). The innovation was inspired by Israel's similarly formed research and development farms (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019a), and it aims to improve livestock and crop production through the improved utilisation of agricultural technologies and better access to quality water (R5).

As such, "AITEC farms serve as pathways for the integrated introduction and demonstration of innovations and technologies for horticulture, crop farming and livestock production that improve the productivity of smallholder farmers" (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019a, p 1). As part of the Seqota Declaration innovation phase, two

farms have been designed, one for the Amhara region and one for the Tigray region (FDRE, 2018b). In Amhara, the AITEC centre has just been started, and there is a similar plan for Tigray (R5).

Costed woreda-based plan (One Plan)

In order to address the limited horizontal coordination among the sectors and to mobilise funding more effectively, a costed woreda-based plan was developed as one of the Seqota Declaration innovations (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019c). The costed woreda-based plan is a comprehensive, costed nutrition plan developed through the collaboration of the implementing sectors and development partners starting from the woreda level, guided by the One goal, One plan and One M&E framework (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019c). The plan outlines the funding necessary to achieve the different activities to ensure a better flow of resources to them. As such, it consolidates the nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific activities and resources of the ministries and development partners at the woreda level. The plan is intended to promote increased awareness of the contribution to nutrition by government sectors and development partners in terms of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities and resources at the woreda level (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019c). The bottom-up, participatory approach also enables increased ownership at the local level (FDRE, 2018b).

Data revolution

As part of the data revolution innovation, a number of interventions are implemented in order to improve the availability, accessibility, quality and usage of data (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019d). The innovation aims to harness new technologies and methodologies. The Unified Nutrition Information System for Ethiopia (UNISE) is a monitoring tool that has been piloted to track nutrition data across the different levels and to visualise performance progress through a dashboard, and enable the disaggregation of information. To address the issue that many areas in Ethiopia have limited or no access to electricity coupled with poor internet connectivity, a solar-powered satellite-based Yazmi Technology solution will be used to enable the transfer of data in such areas. Activities also include the tracking of financial allocation and expenditure along with the mapping of the stakeholders and the capacity strengthening of sectoral focal persons and the Woreda Coordinators (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019d).

4.4.4 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

One of the key roles of the PDUs is performance management (FDRE, 2018b). Sector performance and progress is tracked by key performance indicators that have been jointly developed by the PDU and the sectors (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019d).

Monthly performance reviews are conducted at the kebele and woreda levels, under the leadership of the woreda and kebele administrators (FDRE, 2018b). The outcome reports are then shared with the zonal and regional government administrations. **Quarterly performance reviews** are conducted at the federal and regional levels by the FPDU and RPDUs, with the participation of implementing sectors and development

partners. To synthesise findings, there is also a joint quarterly review meeting conducted by the FPDU and the RPDUs, the outcomes of which are then reported to the political leadership. **Biannual and annual performance reviews** are first conducted at the regional level under the leadership of the Regional Presidents and after the regional meeting, a joint meeting is held with the federal PDU, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. In order to measure outcome and impact, a baseline, process and final **evaluations** were also planned.

5 SYSTEM-BASED PROBLEM FRAMING & REFLEXIVITY

5.1 MOVING BEYOND ONE-DIMENSIONAL PROBLEM DEFINITION

As mentioned in the policy environment section of this paper, Ethiopia has come a long way from emergency response to nutrition to addressing nutrition as a complex issue that necessitates multi-sectoral cooperation. Most of the respondents echoed the importance of a multi-sectoral approach, with some pointing to more holistic frameworks to malnutrition that have influenced the Ethiopian policy documents, such as the UNICEF framework that points to multiple causes of malnutrition (R13) and the Lancet series that emphasise the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to malnutrition (R2). Respondent 7 notes:

> *In terms of the actions, any document in the country reflects the importance of implementing nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, and also the importance of improving the nutrition governance in the country. […] the multi-sectoral nutrition approach is the one that has been recommended and agreed by different sectors, different experts, including the higher-level officials. (R7)*

However, whilst there have been discussions, policies and programmes embracing multi-sectorality since as far back as 2008, at the beginning of the implementation of the Seqota Declaration, this has not translated itself in action yet. Many of the respondents highlighted the siloed approach to nutrition still prevalent in Ethiopia at the time of the early implementation of the Seqota Declaration and the difficulties with translating the concept into actual multi-sectoral coordination on the ground (e.g. R1, R3, R6, R9). As Respondent 9 notes:

> *Before we joined Seqota, we did some diagnostic study to see the current response to nutrition in Ethiopia and what can we learn. So what we saw was really more of a siloed approach; every sector doing their small projects for nutrition, health, agriculture, water, labour and social affairs, but there was little collaboration to see how they can complement each other, add more value and be smarter at integrating the same population. (R9)*

As a result of the absence of actual multi-sectoral coordination at the beginning of the implementation of the Seqota Declaration, respondents noted a variety of challenges that needed to be addressed when trying to operationalise this approach and mainstream nutrition into the different sectoral activities. Initially, it was easier for the health sector to embrace the ideas of sectoral response to nutrition due to it being historically the leader in nutrition efforts (R11), but other sectors have struggled with what nutrition meant for them and how they could resource such activities (R1, R3, R10, R11). Respondent 11 highlights some of the questions that were raised during the earlier phases of the implementation:

> *In the first place when the Seqota Declaration Program Delivery Unit was established, we were challenged because of this misunderstanding of the multi-sectoral approach. Many of the sectors, except the health sector, were confused and were challenging us. […] Agriculture is one of the main sectors that is expected to address malnutrition, but the sector was challenging us. "What is the role and responsibility of the sector? We are just*

working in food security, what are we going to do beyond this?"—they asked us these questions. (R11)

The sectors had their own agendas and their engagement was poor (R3), there was resource competition (R11), and some resistance from the health sector over somewhat losing the main authority in nutrition coordination (R11 and R12).

To operationalise the multi-sectoral approach and establish engagement and accountability among the (at the time) six implementing sectors, a set of 10 strategic objectives and 50 strategic initiatives were outlined (see Appendix 3). Most of the implementing sectors have one corresponding strategic objective, with the exception of the agriculture sector that has four strategic objectives (R11). As for the budget allocation, the agriculture sector receives the largest amount of resources, then water, education, and health. Lastly, labour and social affairs and women, youth and children. The rationale behind the latter two receiving the least is partially that "many workers of the social affairs and women's affairs are just integrated with agriculture and other sectors" (R11).

The extent to which nutrition has been mainstreamed in the different sectoral activities has been varied (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019). As mentioned previously, the Ministry of Health has traditionally been the leader of nutrition efforts and has one of the most advanced nutrition platforms. The Ministry of Agriculture has been implementing an increasing amount of nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions and has been taking a more active role in nutrition leadership (Bach et al., 2020). Early findings show that the collaboration among the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture has shown to increase the efficiency of targeting the beneficiaries of the Productive Safety Net Programme IV (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019). On the other hand, whilst the Ministry of Education endorsed a number of nutrition-sensitive activities, implementation has been poor due to competing priorities in the sector. The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth also struggled to implement nutrition-sensitive interventions due to a lack of active nutrition-sensitive programmes engaging women in the Ministry (Karanja Odhiambo et al., 2019).

5.2 ADDRESSING FOOD SYSTEMS ISSUES

In the publicly available documents of the Seqota Declaration initiative, the food system approach is not mentioned explicitly. Respondent 1 points to the timeline as the main reason for this and notes that the lack of explicit articulation does not mean that it is not addressed:

But when you look at the way in which the Seqota Declaration itself was structured, even in that particular document, even though it does not explicitly say food systems, you can see that they are trying to address different components of the food system. (R1)

Indeed, the strategic objectives and initiatives of the Declaration address the different elements and drivers of food systems. Table 5.1 illustrates which strategic objective (SO) addresses which components.

Table 5.1 Seqota Declaration strategic objectives and the food systems approach

	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	SO6	SO7	SO8	SO9	SO10
Elements										
Food supply chain		X	X							
Food environment		X		X		X	X			
Consumer behaviour	X	X								
Drivers										
Biophysical and environmental					X					
Innovation, technology, infrastructure						X				
Economic and market								X	X	
Political and institutional										X
Socio-cultural								X	X	
Demographic										

Table 5.2 below gives a further, more detailed breakdown of the strategic initiatives in relation to food system elements and drivers.

Table 5.2. Seqota Declaration strategic initiatives and the food systems approach

Initiatives	
Elements	
Food supply chain	Production system *Increase production and consumption of fruits, vegetables, staple crops, pulses, livestock—including ruminants (primarily goat), poultry, fish—and their corresponding animal source products, such as dairy and fish, and also honey (SO2) *Improve animal feed provision and health services (SO2) *Establish best practices for smallholder farmers (SO3) Storage and distribution / Processing and packaging *Promote post-harvest technologies (SO4) Retailing and markets *Create market opportunities for agricultural products (SO4)
Food environment	*Scale up school health and nutrition services (SO1) *Promote home-grown school feeding programme (SO7) *Scale up school WASH programme (SO7) *Scale up implementation of School Health and Nutrition programme (SO7)
Consumer behaviour	*Develop and implement social and behavioural change communication campaigns (SO1) *Implement first 1,000 days plus social movement (SO10)
Drivers	
Biophysical and environmental	*Increase areas treated with soil and water conservation
Innovation, technology, infrastructure	*Expand the water and WASH infrastructure (establishment of Tekeze River Basin Authority, increasing irrigation) *Increase access, coverage and utilisation of renewable energy sources (SO5)
Economic and market	*Promote provision of credits, grants, microfinance services and other income-generating activities (SO8) *Empower women economically (SO9)

Political and institutional	*Mainstream nutrition into sectoral plans (SO10) *Improve multi-sectoral governance (SO10)
Socio-cultural	*Scale up social protection for pregnant and lactating women and children (SO8) *Empower women socially (SO9) *Promote child protection (SO9)
Demographic	-

The above tables show a good coverage of different food system components by the Seqota Declaration strategic objectives and initiatives. A key issue that could affect the successful achievement of the goal and is missing from the initial plans is road connectivity. This has also been recognised since, as Respondent 13 notes:

> *[…] road was not part of the roadmap, but when they wanted to excavate water sites, borehole as well as to reach isolated communities with health services there were accessibility problems. So it became one of the issues that was raised by the woreda. So we incorporated that one into the programme because if you have roads, then you have access to health services, you have access to water, you have access to supplies and everything. So we adjusted. (R13)*

With the Ministry of Transport becoming one of the Seqota Declaration implementing sectors and a strategic objective for the sector is being drafted (R11), it is also expected that the issue of roads will be addressed.

Furthermore, less focus is given to the dynamics between these elements, such as trade-offs and synergies. There are a number of trade-offs that needs to be considered when shifting agricultural production. Horticulture is associated with increased pesticide and fertilizer usage, and herbicide usage has significantly increased in cereal production (Posthumus, de Steenhuijsen-Piters, Dengerink, Vellema, 2018). These have had both negative environmental impacts, but also health impacts. Increased livestock production is associated with increased greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change. Increased livestock production can also contribute to overgrazing and decreased soil fertility. Increased consumption can also cause concern for replacing underconsumption with overconsumption. There are also synergies that can be promoted in the Ethiopian food system, such as parallelly improving ecosystem diversity and dietary diversity (Posthumus et al., 2018).

As mentioned previously, the timing of the Seqota Declaration did not enable the initial documents to embrace the food systems approach explicitly. However, it is increasingly being viewed as an important approach, with the Program Delivery Unit engaging in a number of food systems dialogues, keen to embrace innovative ideas:

> *In fact, we initially organised the Food System Summits with the Global Panel and then we were also part of the first dialogue. So we are closely working there. We believe that whatever game-changing ideas are coming, they can be part of the Seqota Declaration. […] So, it is very helpful and very important for us. (R13)*

With the approach being more and more embraced, considerations have also been increasingly given to food system thinking, including trade-offs and synergies. Respondent 6 confirms that environmental concerns are increasingly being discussed:

What are the environmental consequences of some of the processing activities that we are proposing? We're looking at greenhouse emissions, we are looking at the need to tackle issues related to deforestation, planting trees to compensate. One of the things that we realise in this country is that we don't produce enough, and what we produce is not distributed equally. But then again, you have to offset the costs against the climate effects it has. That's something that we are beginning to look into as well. (R6)

On the other hand, as the endline evaluation of the first phase is not publicly available yet, the above analysis is based on the plans and is unable to assess the extent of the implementation of the specific initiatives.

5.3 REFLEXIVITY

The respondents were asked about their perception of the competing frames around malnutrition and their impact on multi-stakeholder collaboration. Whilst some have observed differences on the individual level, they mostly agreed that there was a common understanding on the organisational level:

I do, of course, think that there is going to be differing perspectives, but I would say in general, there is acceptance among all stakeholders that it is not just their "one way", and they are one part of how nutrition is solved. (R10)

The common understanding of the stakeholders is that everybody has to contribute from their side to bring about the desired change which is ending malnutrition in children by 2030. In terms of resources, there could be competition, but in terms of recognising the contribution of different sectors to bring the desired change, there is not that much discrepancy. (R3)

It seems that the Seqota Declaration initiative was able to connect the different existing frames in a way that created shared responsibility and mission among the stakeholders. As discussed in the conceptual chapter, there are three ways to act reflexively in governance: 1) persuading others to embrace a particular frame, 2) connecting the frames and 3) reaching an agreement on a mutually beneficial option in spite of the frame differences. Connecting frames includes "adding a new superordinate frame that can overarch the variety of existing frames" (Termeer et al., 2015). The Seqota Declaration initiative took a holistic approach in which the different frames can still co-exist and will remain present. Instead of eliminating the different frames, it articulated a common goal—ending stunting by 2030—and defined what each sector could do to reach the goal together. Respondents note that after overcoming the initial challenges, "every sector understood its role and responsibilities" (R11), "all contribute to the outcome" (R9) and "parties or stakeholders are working in harmony" (R3). Respondent 12 points out that representatives from the health sector have even become vocal on an issue that traditionally has not been embraced by the sector and may mean fewer resources for health interventions:

[…] during the debriefing session we had with the African Development Bank in Tigray region, the head for the Bureau of Health […] said, our priority number one is water supply in Seqota Declaration. Imagine; he's not a Bureau of Water, he is from the Bureau of Health and he said that there. The Bureau of Water is there already attending the meeting, but who is speaking is the Head of the Bureau Health. (R12)

However, to arrive at this stage and maintain the collaboration, a number of interventions were necessary. Respondents view the following skills, processes, structures and activities as the most important in creating a shared vision, enabling reflexive observation and leading to the creation of a jointly meaningful response to nutrition issues:

Program Delivery Units: Respondent 2 notes that the Program Delivery Unit is an inherently multi-sectoral and representative structure itself, as it is 'basically the combination of people from different sectors: from the water sector, agriculture sector, education sector'. Others highlighted the strategies the PDU deployed as crucial to shifting the mindset of stakeholders, such as constant advocacy, communication, sensitisation and lobbying around the initiative (R3, R11, R15). The Program Delivery Units deliberately bring together experts that are highly skilled in their soft skills (R9) and as such have the capability to enable reflexive activities. Seemingly, partially due to their high degree of soft skills, the PDU members were able to position themselves as one of the leading change agents of the initiative.

People-focused bottom-up planning: an important feature of the Seqota Declaration initiative that helps manage the competing voices and interests among the government stakeholders is giving "the chance for the communities to prioritise their interventions" (R13). The initiative aims to give priority to the affected communities to define what is their most important problem, shifting away the focus from the government stakeholders—that may feel their certain way of doing should be prioritised—towards the beneficiaries that are affected by such interventions. Respondent 15 illustrates well how this approach affects the mentality and expands people's perspective:

> *We very often conduct field visits and we ask farmers what's their need. It's common to hear them saying, we need roads; the first priority is road, the second is road, the third is road and then the fourth is water. And in other regions, we asked them the same question. They said the number one is water, second water and then third another thing. The farmers don't know our issues, our disagreement. So, if we really care about the needs of the society, when I hear such kinds of requests from local people I give up my ministerial bias and I just focus on the needs of the people at the grassroots level. That kind of perspective is really helping us and that's why we have kept our ministerial committee working and functioning. (R15)*

As such, the effects of this feature are twofold: it not only gives more power and voice to local stakeholders that have traditionally been less involved in decision-making processes but also changes the mindset of the implementers.

Community-based reflexive activities: established as key components of the Community Lab innovation of the Seqota Declaration initiative, Learning Journeys and open days enable reflexive activities at the community level. These activities bring together a number of stakeholders in order to observe best practices in the different communities and discuss if they would work in their own area. Respondent 8 explains that a crucial part of the design was to enable in-depth problem definition and constructive discussions through reflexive activities; thus, a number of "problem identification activities" have been added to the toolkit that is in possession of the

Community Lab facilitators in order to enhance future discussions. The result of providing the community with community-based deliberation activities was surprising:

> *I think originally we really wanted for the Community Labs and for the Learning Journeys to spark a ton of innovation. […] What came out of that was that—while there was some innovation—I don't necessarily think that the innovation was in the solutions. The innovation was in being able to share it so openly and to spark the conversation, to have those conversations. […] It was providing an area to discuss, okay, it's been done in this one area, so let's push ourselves to do it in another community. Those kinds of conversations, I think it's where the innovation took place […]. (R10)*

Formal monitoring and evaluation processes: whilst there will be further discussion on M&E under the principle of adaptability, it is important to note that these mechanisms serve to enable deliberation processes and as feedback mechanisms. Review meetings are "convened to take stock of progress and to support and challenge each other" (R9) and even engage higher-level stakeholders bi-annually to "come together to review, to evaluate, to criticise the programme […] give us directions" (R12).

Informal field visits: Respondent 9 notes the influence of field trips on changing the mindset of people. One such trip was a visit to Israel, where decision-makers and technical staff could see first-hand the successful implementation of a multi-sectoral approach and best practices in a context similar to Ethiopia. Respondent 4 also notes that the nature of the trip also enabled such stakeholders to have a "good time" together, which is very important when considering the tensions inherent in multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches. The second trip brought together the ministers to visit Seqota, where they experienced the realities on the ground and forged a bond over a shared mission (R9). Both meetings seem to have provided a more informal platform for key stakeholders to put away their differences, enhance mutual understanding, change their perspectives and focus on the solutions.

Stakeholders noted a few potential **constraints** that may have an impact on enabling a jointly meaningful story to the fullest.

One such issue was a certain amount of **perceived bias** on different levels. One was regarding the housing of the Program Delivery Unit. The Program Delivery Unit is seated at the Ministry of Health, and some perceive that this may have an influence on their impartiality:

> *Just the fact that the Seqota is embedded within the Ministry of Health kind of detaches it a little bit from the food and agriculture sector. (R1)*

> *Sometimes when a programme or a project is hosted somewhere in one of the ministries, there is a conflict of interest. (R12)*

> *Because the Program Delivery Unit's office is at the Ministry of Health, in one way or another, the PDU is influenced by the Health Minister, because the PDU is seated under the minister there. Even though the literal government structure is just accountable to the Deputy Prime Minister, the seat matters. (R11)*

Respondent 12 also notes that there may be some bias towards the Ministry of Agriculture over the other sectors, visible in the resource allocation. Indeed, whilst

many of the respondents note that water was priority number one, agriculture has been the most funded sector up to date. Respondent 8 also observes a closer relationship between certain sectors and the PDUs over other sectors.

Another issue raised was concerning the observation of a more **rigid organisational culture** at the local and regional level, and somewhat at the national level:

> *My recollection is that there was an organisational culture within the government that I was starting to understand, which was very rigid, very much linear and causal. We'll do A and then B will happen, and then C will happen, and then D will. Quite textbook, quite narrow. It made sense to me that they set these really ambitious goals, and the only way they're going to get there is if they put their work plan together, and they only do what's on their work plan. So people were quite overworked, and it was a really intense environment. (R8)*

> *[...] When they come into an environment and have to be naive and curious and innocent, and want to understand someone else's problem, it's a really discomforting position, I think for them. (R8)*

It is difficult to say if these have a significant impact on the implementation of the whole as the data acquired through the data collection does not indicate the extent of this perception. Respondent 9, for example, points out that sometimes perceived bias is nothing more than "existing realities". For example, "the health sector has traditionally been the strongest sector; they have the platform of the frontline health workers, they have the M&E system" (R9).

There are a few factors that may be counteracting any potential or perceived bias. First, prioritisation is mostly coming from the ground, thus leaving less possibility for favouring one sector over another. On the other hand, even though the water sector has been prioritised by the communities, the agriculture sector is still the largest recipient of funding. However, this may be changing, as the Program Delivery Unit has secured funding from the African Development Bank for a project with a large focus on water (R12). This may tip the percentage of allocation more towards the water sector. As for the seating issue, with the new national nutrition structure, there is a possibility that the FPDU will be removed from under the Ministry of Health. Increased engagement with sectors that are not represented within the PDU and are less involved in implementing the activities, such as MoLSA and MoWCY, could help improve the balance between the interactions.

As for the reflexivity and open-mindedness, that may be something to explore further with local level implementers. Ensuring the continuance of the reflexive activities that are part of the Community Labs toolkit and giving stakeholders a chance to come together under less formal circumstances could help ease the goal-oriented approach and enable some further depth to reflexivity.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it can be argued that the Seqota Declaration has moved beyond one-dimensional problem framing. It approaches nutrition as a complex issue that requires a number of different solutions and a holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-

stakeholder approach. Over time, besides the initially strongly prevalent siloed working and a poor understanding of the practical implementation of a multi-sectoral approach, stakeholders have managed to shift towards embracing a shared goal and developing a shared understanding.

However, besides the significant progress, the initiative has not reached a fully systematic approach to the problem of malnutrition (or, in this case, stunting in particular) yet. Whilst there has been progress in mainstreaming nutrition into the different sectoral activities, it is still at its very early stages even in the policy processes, let alone in their implementation. Furthermore, albeit the initiative implicitly addresses a wide range of food systems issues, it mostly focuses on the different components of food systems, and it has given less attention to food systems dynamics, such as synergies and trade-offs between the different components. Not addressing crucial systems dynamic issues—such as the trade-offs between agricultural intensification and climate change—could undermine the long-term sustainability of the activities.

The positive shift in mindset could be attributed to the prevalence of a number of conditions that enable reflexivity and stakeholders that were capable of deploying reflexive action and observation. Respondents have observed the existence of differing narratives, but the initiative was able to connect these frames through a strong and powerful superordinate goal in a way that created a shared mission and vision among the stakeholders. Uniting stakeholders over the idea of ending stunting as both a moral obligation but also as an economic necessity has proven to be powerful and has lifted this specific issue at the top of the political agenda. As such, it may continue to stay there until stunting is significantly reduced, if not eliminated. Whilst the upside of this strategy is that it made it easier for stakeholders to relate to the goal from their own perspective, a potential downside may be the necessity to continuously manoeuvre the different perspectives and also keep up the momentum.

The above would not have been possible without a wide range of enabling conditions that are present across the public, private and third sectors and across the different levels of governance. Through the people-focused bottom-up planning, community-based reflexive activities, formal monitoring and evaluation processes, informal field visits, and activities led by the Program Delivery Unit, a wide range of stakeholders have been able to share their perspectives and influence decision-making processes related to the Seqota Declaration. Whilst based on the findings it is safe to assume that reflexive activities have been ongoing on the national and regional level since their setup, it has been difficult to assess the extent to which continuity was present at the local level.

Some of the remaining constraints on fully enabling reflexivity have been a perceived bias on the side of the Federal Program Delivery Unit—due to its seat under the Ministry of Health and closeness to certain sectors—and a rigid organisational structure. As for the former, whilst it did not completely hinder stakeholders from reaching a shared understanding over the years, it has definitely set progress back. As for the latter, this may be something to dig deeper into. Resolving these two constraints could further enhance collaboration.

The limitations to progress noted earlier are likely due to the time it takes to make change happen, not because of the lack of effort. Given the high prevalence of reflexivity among the driving stakeholders of the initiative, achieving an even more systematic approach does not necessarily seem to be out of reach. The government and third sector stakeholders related to the Seqota Declaration initiative showed knowledge about and openness to continuously embracing new ideas, innovations and improving their practices based on emerging research and global recommendations.

6 BOUNDARY-SPANNING STRUCTURES & RESCALING

6.1 SPANNING BOUNDARIES

The two main governance structures that connect policy domains, enable interactions among public and private actors and across administrative divisions as part of the Seqota Declarations are the Program Delivery Units and the Community Labs.

Besides the two structures, there are also a plethora of formal platforms where stakeholders come together. These are illustrated in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Seqota Declaration formal platforms spanning governance structures

Platform	Frequency	Level	Stakeholders
Community Lab meetings	Monthly	Kebele, woreda	Community
Review meeting	Monthly	Kebele, woreda	Public sector
Review meeting	Quarterly	Regional	Public sector
Review meeting	Quarterly	Federal	Public sector
Review meeting	Quarterly	Joint	Public sector, third sector
Learning Journeys	Bi-annually	Kebele, woreda	Community, public sector
Open days	Bi-annually	Kebele, woreda	Community, public sector
Review meeting	Bi-annually	Regional then joint at federal	Public sector
Review meeting	Annually	Regional then joint at federal	Public sector
Costed woreda-based planning	Beginning of each phase	Kebele, woreda to national and back	Community, public sector, third sector

A number of informal mechanisms have also been mentioned, such as WhatsApp (R1), sectoral platforms, virtual platforms, workshops (R11), field visits (R3) and the Presidential Advisors (R13) check-ins or offline conversations to exchange notes (R9).

6.2 CONNECTING SCALES

6.2.1 SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The Seqota Declaration **Program Delivery Units** enable horizontal interaction between ministries at the federal level, between bureaux at the regional level, and vertical interaction from the federal to the kebele level. The Woreda Coordinator—a PDU footprint—enables horizontal coordination among the sectors at the woreda level (R5). Any meeting related to the Seqota Declaration innovation phase is led by the PDUs (R7). The main responsibilities of the PDUs are (i) coordination, networking, collaboration and cooperation of stakeholders; (ii) policy and program advocacy in nutrition for different leadership as well as stakeholders; and (iii) resource mobilisation from the federal and regional government and from development partners (R11).

The majority of the respondents view the PDUs as the key, most advanced innovation of the Seqota Declaration, successful in bringing a variety of actors together. The key **successful features** of the PDUs are establishing authority and having mobility across scales.

Establishing authority: In the existing governance structures, the issue of authority has been one of the most significant ones. Many of the NNP II implementing sectors did not accept the authority of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education. They viewed them as parallel entities, with powers not larger than theirs, and this created an issue for the effective implementation of multi-sectoral coordination (R11, R13, R15). In general, a delivery unit is "meant to be a small unit within the government, and their sole mandate is focused on driving all the different actors of a programme and reporting to the government on the progress, on the bottlenecks, tracking achievements, and be able to ensure that we have a sense of how things are" (R9). As such, it is a somewhat independent unit that can coordinate with less bias. To strengthen the authority of the Program Delivery Units, they were all made to be accountable to the highest level of authorities at each stage. This translated in practice in a way that if the Program Delivery Unit requested something, it was viewed as a request from the "top hierarchy" (R13).

Mobility across scales and access to leadership: One of the most important features of the PDU is its mobility across scales and access to high leadership. PDUs inherently have an easier move across different scales, "cross over different organisations, cross across the different stakeholders that are needed" (R10). As such, "they're in a position where they can relieve bottlenecks quickly and fast. That's something that they need to be able to do; they need to be able to pick up the phone and call the decision-maker" (R10). Indeed, the direct line of communication with ministers from the implementing sectors "led to technical experts becoming more engaged" (R3).

The most often **challenges** to the PDU were regarding its purpose and place in the existing nutrition governance structure.

Purpose: At first, stakeholders were confused about the role and purpose of the Seqota Declaration initiative. Resolving misconceptions took a significant time to overcome. Some of the confusion included the following points:

> *So I think the first was probably a sense of what exactly is the purpose of this delivery unit, and how does it displace or replace existing civil servants? I think they saw this as a threat, that this delivery unit is going to be exposing their flaws or their shortfalls to the ministers or the Prime Minister. So I think that was probably the key challenge. But I think, as trust was built and they saw that this team is helping them to look good, helping them to deliver on their goals, they began to work more together in a much more collaborative manner, I would say. (R9)*

> *Another challenge was that the local communities used to view the Seqota Declaration as an NGO rather than a government-led intervention. So it took time to make people understand that the Seqota Declaration is a special government commitment, even the people at the regional states. […] (R15)*

Clash with existing structures: Whilst the Seqota Declaration initiative aims to support the ongoing NNP II, and use the existing nutrition governance structure, but it ended up creating an almost parallel system (R7, R9, R11). This was due to the different focus of the initiative (R13), but also due to the governance structures being weak, especially at the local level, where the interventions were focused (R11). This has caused some structure confusion between the two systems and some tension between the new system and the existing system.

The **Community Labs** bring together a wide range of stakeholders at the kebele and woreda levels and report upwards to the other levels. The Community Labs "encapsulate the multi-sectoral notion of the Seqota Declaration at the local level" (R8). The Community Labs were able to bring together a number of different stakeholders: "You had every different sector represented, from the priests that came, the mothers that came, the women's development army they came, health extension workers, agriculture extension workers". (R10). Some of the initial challenges also included structure confusion. Given the number of ongoing interventions, community members were uncertain if they were even part of a Community Lab or not (R8). This has been improved through the redesign of the innovation (R8).

Respondents view the **formal platforms** as an effective way of bringing stakeholders together, improving responsibility and accountability. Some of these meetings have been impacted by COVID 19, but according to Respondent 15 and Respondent 11, they have been regular in the past.

Informal platforms are used to follow up formal communications (R3), to undo bottlenecks (R1, R9) and to build stronger relationships (R9). Respondent 1 argues that it is somewhat neglected are that needs more attention:

> *It is an important aspect of what goes on. The network that you are embedded in can influence how effective you are in what you are doing, and we don't give it enough attention. If somebody asked me, how is it that you've been able to link into the government processes so effectively? I have worked my networks. The informal network, sometimes, depending on what you're facing might be even more important than the formal one. The formal networks have a way of gridlocking, and once they are gridlocked, it's the back channels that work. It's the back channels that unblock the situation, but somehow we pretend those back channels are not there. […] So I think it is a critical component of making things work, and an effort must be made to develop an awareness of that and figure out how to work these networks better. (R1).*

6.2.2 LIMITATIONS

There is a high level of multi-sectoral collaboration among the implementing sectors, the community, donor organisations and development partners. The initiative has also been supported by research institutions, such as the Ethiopian Public Health Institute, and the academia, such as the Universities in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Some of the key multi-sectoral limitations observed are regarding NGO to NGO cooperation and public-private partnerships.

Third sector cooperation: Some note the lack of shared understanding among the donor community:

> *My problem is the following: donor organisations and countries, developing partners, they have their own agendas. […] it is not happening enough that all the donor and development partners put their shoulders underneath and say, let us do this together. There is still too much fragmentation, too much own interest, own agendas and own strategies of all the donors and the development partners that work in the country. (R6)*

Some point to the siloed spaces in which international organisations operate:

> *So, the tensions are there but I think they are made worse by international organisations working in countries because we come in our silos and we help people and expect them to stay in a silo that we are placing them in. (R1)*

And others point to the difficulties of cooperating with other organisations because of bureaucracy:

> *Sadly, we've had some attempts and nothing has happened from them. We've attempted to have some collaboration with organisations that were willing to provide funding, but they didn't fit in exactly to what the PDU requested, and it kind of got shut down. (R4)*

There is also a possibility that representatives from the third sector working at the more local levels have difficulties accessing multi-sectoral fora, as, for example, Respondent 4 notes that they have not been to any review meetings or other multi-sectoral meetings, and their engagement was mostly with the Program Delivery Units. This needs to be further researched, as it is consistent with the findings of the Baseline Assessment that noted more limited third sector involvement at the lower levels.

Public-private cooperation: The majority of the respondents agree that the engagement of the private sector is one of the biggest limitations of the initiative and "has been identified as the major weakness of the Seqota Declaration" (R11). Whilst some attempts have been made to engage private actors more recently (R6, R13), the voice of the private sector is mostly represented by the SUN Business Network (R1). Respondents note that the reasons behind limited collaboration are the limited presence of the private sector in the implementation areas (R4, R6). Constraints on private sector involvement include the lack of infrastructure (R4, R9) and the lack of a credible investment case (R9).

6.3 RESCALING

As outlined in the theoretical framework, we can distinguish between four types of boundary conflicts, such as policy domain conflicts, time horizon conflicts, scale conflicts and society-public governance conflicts. This section will focus on time horizon conflicts and scale conflicts, as the policy domain conflicts have already been discussed in section 5, and due to the more national level of the research, the society-public governance conflicts could not be assessed.

6.3.1 SCALE CONFLICTS

As mentioned previously, wicked problems such as food insecurity do not occur at only one level; whilst food security may be defined at the global level and national level, its impacts are experienced from the individual to the global level. As such, the question of authority, accountability come up. Who holds the power, who is in control? According to

multilevel governance theory, state power and control can be displaced three ways: "i) upward to international actors and organizations, ii) downward to regions, cities, and communities; and iii) outward to civil society and non-state actors" (Termeer et al., 2014, p. 42).

As for upward level displacement, it seems that whilst the Seqota Declaration initiative has been influenced by international actors and organisations, it kept a lot of the power in the hands of the government stakeholders. For example, Respondent 7 notes:

> *[…] the federal PDU is the one contacting different partners to be engaged in the process, rather than the partners go to the PDU, having extra demand. It's the PDU that is inviting other donors and partners to be part of this implementation process and the innovation phase. (R7)*

Some view this development as a positive one:

> *It's a government commitment where they have decided we want to do this, and essentially what they're saying you want to help us? Please help us do this. Essentially, quit running around like headless chickens across the country, doing your own things, here's a framework within which we want to do things, please come and help us. (R1)*

Whilst others believe that the strong centralisation of power has had some detrimental impact on the efficiency of the interactions:

> *With the Seqota Declaration, everything is through the government. Like everything we do is through the PDU. Everything. And then everything needs to be approved by a bunch of different actors. It took us about eight months in between contracts to finalise the contract, the next phase. There's a lot of time waiting for the next thing because a lot of people need to approve it, and people change office, and then you need to explain everything, and this makes things take longer. (R4)*

As for downward level displacement, as mentioned previously, Ethiopia has decentralised decision-making, where the power generally lies between the federal and the regional levels. Initially, the Seqota Declaration was relatively centralised at the national level, and more top-down, which respondents argue was necessary for setting it up. However, as it can be seen from embracing bottom-up planning and giving the community a stronger voice, it can be argued that since it has shifted more towards a more decentralised structure. Respondent 9 also confirms a shift over time:

> *[…] once Seqota was launched, even though it was launched in collaboration with the Regional Presidents, it was really seen as a national agenda. […]. But now what we have is for every year of funding that the federal government allocates money, they engage the individuals to have like a one to one cost share. They [regional actors] match the federal allocations with regional allocation to have more impact. So it's a co-investment approach now. Secondly, the federal level has learnt to take a step back now, and allow the regionals to do the planning and prioritising on what activities need to be done to have an impact. There is a more respectful acceptance of responsibilities of power, of a set of knowledge towards delivering the results that we're looking for. That's probably where we are now. It's more of a mutually respectful, commitment to or responsibility for Seqota, between local and the national. (R9)*

As such, a potentially better fit has been created between the problem scale and the governance scale, as at the end of the day, the communities are the most affected by the consequence of food insecurity. However, whilst a better fit may have been created, some argue that a lot of redundancy was also created. As highlighted earlier, the Program Delivery Unit, one of the main structures of the initiative, created a parallel authority at the regional level, which resulted in some confusion among the stakeholders. For example, Respondent 14 notes that when the Regional PDUs were established, the Regional Health Bureau has formerly had the authority to oversee nutrition efforts; now, the PDU and the related platforms have also established authority over this. Respondent 15 also confirms the presence of differing ideas and tolerance of the created redundancy:

> *But some ministries feel that there is a lot of redundancy; chains between line ministries, and then there is a PDU, there is the regional administration. So there is no common consensus on the role of the PDU. But in my opinion, it's very effective and very important. (R15)*

As for the outward level displacement, as indicated earlier, the private sector engagement has been limited at best, and due to the scope of the research, it has been difficult to asses to what extent have local civil society organisations been engaged. Respondent 4 argues that the lack of private sector engagement reinforces the issue of centralisation of power on the PDU's side:

> *[...] the PDU needs to also understand and be flexible sometimes. They need to understand what it means to be flexible. This is what the private sector is able to do. There it doesn't matter if things are not perfect; sometimes you have to take a step sideways and then take 10 steps forward. (R4)*

It is important to note that some of the Seqota Declaration initiative structures have been set up as a temporary arrangement. For example, the Program Delivery Unit staff is expected to be absorbed into the reformed governance structures once the Food and Nutrition Policy is established (R9, R14).

6.3.2 TIME HORIZON CONFLICTS

In Ethiopia, emergency situations occur quite frequently. A time horizon conflict the country often faces is balancing out the short-term, ad hoc interventions against the long-term development interventions. For example, due to the conflict in the Tigray area, the Seqota Declaration interventions had to be replanned, and the resources were redirected towards more emergency intervention (R11).

Respondent 9 raises concerns about service continuity among the donor community due to their siloed mandates:

> *Where I see tensions is not in developing countries; it's coming from out there, where you have these tensions around severe acute malnutrition versus moderate acute malnutrition versus other things. UNICEF is in charge of this and the WHO is in charge of something else, but the child is the same. If the child has got moderate acute malnutrition, then they say no, that's UNICEF's responsibility. If the child transitions to severe acute malnutrition, then they feel no, that is WHO's responsibility. But yesterday, the child had moderate acute malnutrition, the same child today has got the other, and there's this institutional split.*

That's where I think there are some tensions that really don't help. […] We were writing some kind of a proposal associated with the Seqota Declaration, led by WFP. WFP is working on fresh food vouchers as part of the Productive Safety Net Programme. […], where's the food going to come from? […] It needs to be produced or it needs to come in. So we need to think in terms of livelihoods and smallholder producers, and it was very interesting when somebody simply says no, but that's not WFP's mandate. I'm thinking okay, but your mandate is not going to work unless this other thing works. (R1)

Respondent 4 echoes the concerns about service continuity in the country and highlights that short-term interventions may also be increasing dependency:

It will be the same business as usual, let's give a few farmers some chickens, let's give a few farmers some seeds. This is a lot of what's still happening, some of the large NGOs, this is still what they're doing, and in my opinion, it makes things worse: it creates dependency, it's aid and we should be pushing forward trade. This is something that needs to change among the larger NGOs that are really not contributing, they're actually making things worse by giving out things for free without any type of economic programme behind them. I'll correct myself for what you asked before about resistance. I think a lot of the resistance is the large NGOs; their implementation is harmful, and that needs to be changed completely. There needs to be a whole different mindset by the implementers, and how change really happens. I think we're very far from that. (R4)

Respondent 6 highlights that the funding practices of the donor community also contribute strongly to hindering continuity:

So what you often see is the funding opportunities that we get allow for some innovation, some project, and so on that lasts only for three years. And then they stop again, and then you run to another request for proposal. So maybe you were doing something on fruits in Tigray with funding from the Dutch, and that comes to an end and the next one is the Danish, and they want you to do something in a completely different area. So the issue is that there is not enough opportunity to sit together as government and development partners to see okay, what are the things that we have tried that seem to work? And then say, this is something that we all need to do to reach scale because everybody wants to see innovations that can be scaled up. But we don't get the opportunity to scale it up, because by the time we've done the project, the three years are over, and it stops there. There are very few donor organisations that give you the opportunity to try something out to say, this seems to work, now, let's make it bigger. (R6)

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

As part of the initiative, a number of boundary-spanning mechanisms have been implemented. These include the Program Delivery Unit and the Community Labs as the main multi-sectoral structures and a number of both formal and informal platforms. These platforms have mostly been successful in enabling collaboration among the stakeholders that have access to them. The main limitation is that not all stakeholders have access to these platforms, and those who do have access do not have it equally.

The strongest component seems to be the collaboration among the government stakeholders from the kebele to the national level. Third sector representatives have access to the platforms where government stakeholders interact, albeit this has mostly been observed at the national level due to the scope of the research. Furthermore,

whilst third sector to public sector cooperation is present at the national, and to some extent sub-national level, third sector to third sector cooperation seems to be highly problematic. There are also platforms where the community-level actors can interact with the government stakeholders, but there has not been an indication that the third sector was present there. A key actor, the private sector, is mainly absent.

The rescaling capabilities of the initiative are in line with the above findings.

One of the strengths of the Seqota Declaration can be viewed in its downward level displacement of power that seems to support more ownership at the regional and local level, resulting in strengthened cooperation among the public sector stakeholders across different scales and also community-level stakeholders.

However, in relation to collaboration with international actors and organisations and civil society and non-state actors, the upward and outward level displacement of power has been limited. As for the former, the government actors and the PDU hold a lot of centralised power, which has both upsides and downsides. On the upside, it is apparent from the critique on the third sector cooperation that international actors need to be coordinated closely, as most have their own agenda and could harm the goals of the initiative if they were to act upon them without going through the government. On the downside, this has made it more difficult for some to contribute their knowledge and support to the initiative.

Furthermore, the centralisation of power has not resolved the issue of a critical time horizon conflict concerning short-term emergency interventions and long-term development interventions. This threatens service continuity and makes interventions less integrated than they could be. As a country that is a continued recipient of emergency aid and is often required to switch between humanitarian assistance and development interventions to address the immediate needs of its population, there is a major need to improve the humanitarian-development nexus. Connecting the humanitarian and development nexus seems to be an unmined field, which could help the initiative achieve longer-term goals even when facing short-term pressure. A 2020 study done by the Emergency Nutrition Network confirms the above observations, and it concludes that the Ethiopia humanitarian-development nexus is in great need of improvement (ENN, 2020).

Even then, donor communities will continue to be motivated by their own agendas, and the focus of government actors will be influenced by shifting and competing demands, so whilst an improved nexus is crucial for progress, it will probably not be enough on its own.

As for outward level displacement of power, the private sector is also a critically underutilised stakeholder. Besides the resource constraints mentioned earlier, government stakeholders are also inherently part of bureaucracy that slows down progress and efficiency, and the private sector could be able to help out with some of the bottlenecks or may be less constrained to act. The private sector could contribute to agriculture, food fortification, innovation and local solutions, workplace, just to name a few. Most importantly, it may be able to ensure a continued inflow of resources to the

activities that the donor community and the government may not be able to do so on the long run. Therefore, this is also an unmined field that could potentially significantly improve the time horizon conflict, as it would likely provide sustainability for the different projects.

7 ADAPTABILITY & RESILIENCE

7.1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As outlined in the conceptual framework, it is advised to monitor progress on the process level and the outcome level. The Seqota Declaration has mechanisms in place to evaluate accordingly.

Performance reviews: Performance reviews start at the woreda level and occur on a monthly, quarterly, biannual and annual basis and bring together stakeholders from the implementing sectors, the highest level of leadership at each level and third sector representatives on the regional and national level (see table 6.1). There is a strong focus on the review meetings starting at the woreda level, and that reporting is sequential upwards (R9). These review meetings are also where a lot of reflexive activities take place, as established earlier, and a lot of bottlenecks are solved there, as "nobody wants to go for that meeting and be seen to be like a roadblock to anything happening" (R9).

Baseline, process and outcome evaluation: The Seqota Declaration Investment Plan outlines a number of outcome evaluation mechanisms to be conducted, namely baseline, process and endline evaluation (FDRE, 2018b). The baseline evaluation was carried out by the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), and its findings were made publicly available in 2019 (FDRE, 2019). It can be seen from the actions taken after the baseline assessment that the results have been considered by the stakeholders, and measures have been taken to address the biggest shortcomings outlined by the appraisal. A process evaluation was also undertaken by John Hopkins University together with a technical partner called IDinsight (R11). Whilst these two evaluations have identified successes and gaps at the time, but they did not show the impact of the interventions (R11).

Respondent 11 notes that "it is expected from the endline survey to see whether this innovation phase was successful in terms of stunting reduction or not. So this survey is not done yet, but we expect it after the finalisation of this innovation phase". However, Respondent 2 notes that not all the outcome level processes were carried out as planned:

> *Originally, we planned a comprehensive impact evaluation, which starts from having a baseline survey and some operational research at the middle of the intervention, and we also planned to have an endline survey. But the Seqota Declaration, regardless of the plan, lacks financial and operational support from donors that limits the level of its implementation. That also applies to the impact evaluation; we didn't secure enough fund to undertake the evaluation as we have originally planned […] (R2)*

It has been raised as an option for the endline survey to be absorbed into the national survey conducted by EPHI in preparation for the upcoming Food and Nutrition Strategy (R7). On the other hand, Respondent 9 confirms that engagements are underway in order to establish how far the initiative is from reaching the 2030 goal:

> *Currently, we are engaging Johns Hopkins again to undertake what we call the LiST analysis—the lives saved tool—to run the data that we have, to try to project where we*

think there's been a shift or a move in terms of how many lives have been saved, how many kids are prevented from getting stunted, as well as determining how far away we are from that goal of 2030. (R9)

7.2 INFORMATION SHARING

Information sharing is being encouraged by the Data Revolution innovation of the initiative, including the use of new technologies, such as the new Unified Nutrition Information System for Ethiopia (UNISE) and the Yazmi technology.

UNISE: key indicators that could help track progress were identified for all the different sectors and combined in one platform. The aim of the tool is to "give a sense of progress, and use it to take action and do the review meetings and course correction". However, respondents note the slow progress and concerns about the scalability of the project.

I think that process has been slow; it is operating in just about one quarter of the Seqota Declaration woredas. It is not totally covering the region, but at least it's a start in the right direction. (R9)

As for the scalability of the system, now we're looking at different opportunities and feasible technology to scale up this UNISE, because it's not that much feasible to provide computers to more than 1,000 woredas. So we're thinking of using the online system of DHIS2 to improve the connectivity of each woreda so they can use their mobile or their existing computer in the sectors so that we can easily expand the UNISE implementation in other woredas. (R7)

Yazmi: Given that the Seqota Declaration areas are far from the grid, implementers started exploring the use of satellite solutions, such as the solar-powered Yazmi technology. Respondent 11 confirms that there has been progress in the installation of the platform in the Tigray region, but it was "interrupted because most of the material is looted" (R11).

Excel-based monitoring: this tool is a monthly monitoring tool that follows the Seqota Declaration reporting format (R11). There is general information about the kebele, there are targets for each sector, and after filling in the data, a dashboard appears. However, progress with this has now been interrupted:

At the time when the Internet was active in the region, it was very, very good. Every coordinator in the woreda oversaw the kebeles to send their data and the kebele coordinator was reviewing their data based on their dashboard, and written feedback was given for each kebele. But after the crisis flared up in the region, this was interrupted. (R11)

Even though there are three new tools being piloted, acquiring accurate data remains a challenge (R5, R13):

Getting accurate data is a serious problem at the woreda level. We are trying to establish robust data management systems, we are trying to pilot UNISE and we have Excel-based data collection formats to track the performance of the kebeles. But there is a data quality issue; either data is not properly coming, or if it comes, there are quality problems with that. (R13)

The capacity to acquire and use data varies not only across the different levels but also across the implementing sectors. According to Odbiambo et al. (2019) some sectors—such as the health sector who has a history of capturing nutrition-related information—have been able to acquire data more easily than other sectors. This is also apparent from the 2011 EFY annual performance review, where the performance report completeness for the Amhara Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs was 5 out of 10 and for the Amhara Bureau of Women Affairs was 2.5 out of 10, whilst the other implementing sectors scored between 7 and 8 out of 10.

The above mechanisms mainly concern sharing information among government stakeholders and the third sector. There have also been measures put in place to share information with the public. To promote the first 1,000 days plus public movement, both the Amhara and the Tigray PDUs are collaborating with the mass media and radio stations (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019e). As such, 450 media and correspondence specialists have been trained and are actively engaging with the movement. A communications and public relations network has likewise been set up to support the execution of the movement (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019e).

7.3 RESILIENCE

Seqota Declaration stakeholders engage in a wide range of experimentation and exploration. The whole aim of the innovation phase is to identify new ways of approaching a problem and then scale best practices. After the initial identification of challenges to malnutrition, six innovations were designed.

The Costed Woreda-Based Planning was chosen in order to address the limited multisectoral planning at the woreda level and to enhance woreda-level ownership. The Program Delivery Units and the Community Labs were designed to address issues with horizontal and vertical multi-sectoral integration—the former more at the national and regional level, whilst the latter more at the community level. AITECs were designed to identify innovations for smallholder farmers that are both producers and consumers of food and are among the most vulnerable. The Data Revolution was designed to address the lack of information sharing and the availability and accessibility of data. Finally, the 1,000 days plus public movement was designed to enhance community-level nutrition interventions. During the expansion phase, best practices are expected to be scaled in further woredas. However, these best practices and what is going to be scaled have not been made publicly available yet.

A robust measure supported by the initiative is the Productive Safety Net Programme, which has been proved helpful in maintaining livelihoods during crisis (Bahru et al. 2020). The general activities undertaken as part of the Seqota Declaration have also been noted to help the areas affected by different emergency situations:

> *I'd say yes, the Seqota plans and activities have helped the target areas to cope with such challenges. Because the support that the target areas get is not the one that every other farmer or every other area get. They get special support being powered, being supported by the Seqota Declaration. I would say that it has helped mitigate the challenges faced by the pandemic and pest outbreaks, like the locust invasion that we had. In terms of, for*

instance, climate change, there is an irrigations team that Seqota woredas get. So even in terms of mitigating the challenge of climate change, the Seqota woreda people get better assistance, and they are in a better position to cope with those issues (R3).

As for **observing** weak signals and considering unexpected challenges, the Seqota Declaration is not in a position to forecast emergency situations due to its scope (R13, R15, R7). Respondents also note that there is an Early Warning System and have a National Disaster Risk Management Commission Prevention Agency or Corporation at the federal level that is already in charge of forecasting (R7). However, Respondent 13 notes that so far, no risk management has been put in place:

But every time, whenever you prepare a plan, it is good to have a risk management plan at least. I believe that a risk management plan must be part of the Seqota Declaration plan so that anytime there is an emergency situation or risk happens, you have the mitigation mechanisms. At the Seqota Declaration level, it may be very difficult to have a structure or to forecast these type of incidences. But what I propose is, when we prepare a plan, we should have a risk mitigation or risk management plan. That means we have to forecast what risk might happen and then put a mitigation plan in advance. So that whatever things, whatever such type of incidents happen then we can be well prepared. This must be part of our programme, that's what I think. (R13)

The decentralised nature of the government does **enable** some flexibility in face of emergency situations, which is illustrated by the fast response to COVID19 and the re-routing of planning and re-allocation of resources after the onset of the Tigray crisis.

COVID10 affected most of the works, and thus the PDUs developed a mitigation plan to advise on how to implement the coordination under the circumstances (R11). They also loosened some of the regulations to enable woredas and kebeles to continue some activities. However, according to Respondent 13, they soon realised that some of the other emergencies, such as the drought of food insecurity, could have a more negative impact than COVID19, so they tried to carry on with activities whilst taking all the necessary COVID-19 protection measures.

As for the Tigray crisis, it has been very challenging. Respondent 11 notes that every platform has been negatively affected; the extension services, the health system, the agricultural system were disrupted, also the schools. The crisis also caused displacement. The PDUs have come up with a recovery plan with the sectors:

The Seqota Declaration includes mainly developmental activities, especially infrastructure, construction, primary schools. With the disruption of the community's livelihood, many of these activities can't be done. So we made a recovery plan, and we chose priorities. We decided that recovery should focus on food and nutrition, WASH and medicine for both humans and livestock. We had to reshuffle the implementing priorities. (R11)

We have already made the plans for 2021. As conditions changed, the ministries also had to change their plan. The sectors are aware of the crisis on the ground, and it was not a challenge to shift the plan. Given that we aren't able to construct now, we had to plan for mitigating the challenge. The sectors, the regions and the ministries were on board, and the donors were aware of this. So we prioritised food, WASH and medicine. The crisis response recovery plan went in every direction: it went through the regional government

office, the regional president, the federal sectors, the regional sectors. The FPDU was also there, giving direction. We worked together in a synergetic way. (R11)

7.4 CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that the Seqota Declaration initiative has been able to consolidate a systematic and coordinated approach to monitoring and evaluation that involves a wide range of stakeholders from the local to the national level.

This is due to the boundary-spanning arrangements identified in section 6.1 that have enhanced relational learning processes both vertically and horizontally and as such enabled addressing changing conditions, overall contributing to strengthened governance across the levels. However, the mechanisms to evaluate progress on the process level have been more consistent and timely than the ones to evaluate outcomes.

It is important to note that the Baseline Assessment was published approx. 2 years into the implementation phase of the innovation phase, leaving stakeholders very limited time to act on the findings. Carrying out the Baseline Assessment during the preparation phase of the innovation phase could have helped with incorporating the findings before the actual implementation started, making it easier to take the necessary measures. Similarly, an impact or endline evaluation has not been conducted yet; thus, it is not possible to see the actual impact the implementation has had on stunting reduction so far. As such, the expansion phase planning and setting up has moved forward without in-depth information on the broader impacts of the different activities. Given that the first phase focused on experimentation, it is possible that the implications of this delay will not be as significant as if they happened at a later stage, but it does not provide an ideal situation for moving into the second phase. In summary, whilst achievements towards improved governance are constantly being identified and acted upon, achievements towards improved outcomes have not been evaluated yet. Monitoring implementation and monitoring results are both crucial for achieving project goals, and limiting either of them could have a negative impact on the overall achievements.

There has been a lot of progress in the way information is shared among the stakeholders. Under the data revolution innovation, a new information system—UNISE—is being piloted, and a new technology—Yazmi—is being established. Excel-based monitoring is also supporting the collection and sharing of data. Whilst these innovations could all be useful for enhancing information sharing, they do have limitations. First of all, at this stage, UNISE has only been implemented in a limited number of woredas, whilst Yazmi has been disrupted in the Tigray region. Secondly, some stakeholders at the local level have limited capacity to acquire quality data and use the data. Thirdly, stakeholders across the different sectors also have a varying level of capacity to monitor and evaluate. The latter two limitations may have more weight than the former. Even if UNISE and Yazmi are not scalable in the end, the Excel-based monitoring system has proven to be successful to monitor information. However, without ensuring that the information acquired and entered into any of the platforms is accurate and stakeholders are able to use it, it will not be as informative as it could be.

The extent to which weak signals are observed and unexpected challenges are considered is limited. As a 15 year plan, the Seqota Declaration initiative seems to be neither long nor broad enough to warrant the setup of a forecasting system nor short enough to completely ignore unexpected challenges or risks. Not having anything integrated to observe weak signals and unexpected challenges potentially makes it even more vulnerable for such situations, such as the Tigray conflict. It also makes it vulnerable to challenges that can be expected to some extent and incorporated into planning, such as the impacts of climate change or environmental degradation. For example, as noted in section 5.2, the lack of analysis and forecasting around the dynamics between the different elements of the food systems can undermine the long-term sustainability of the activities. Assessing such dynamics and potential outcomes could not only contribute to a more systemic approach to the issue of stunting, but it could also contribute to strengthening the resilience of the initiative.

Due to the limited observations and forecasting, the actions of the Seqota Declaration initiative in the event of unexpected emergency situations have been more reactive than proactive, although arguable predicting COVID-19 or the crisis in Tigray is verging on impossible. However, partially due to the enabling condition of the decentralisation of power, stakeholders at the regional level were able to move relatively quickly to reorient planning and resources.

Furthermore, regardless of the limited resilient observation, the initiative has taken a number of resilient measures, both through learning by doing and through endorsing a robust social protection mechanism.

As for the former, learning by doing is at the core of the initiative. Arguably, all the innovations possess the capacity to challenge the status quo and find new ways of coping with challenges and thus enhancing resilience. At this stage, it is difficult to assess what has worked for some of the innovations, such as the 1,000 days plus public movement and the AITECs, although successes and challenges with the PDU, Community Lab and the Data Revolution have been touched upon. Nevertheless, the presence of these innovations shows openness and flexibility to adjusting practices according to emerging new dynamics and multiple contexts.

As for the latter, research shows that one particular, unique and robust mechanism endorsed by the Seqota Declaration initiative—the Productive Safety Net Programme—has proved to be helpful in maintaining livelihoods during crisis (Bahru et al., 2020).

8 INCLUSIVENESS & RESPONSIVENESS

8.1 INCLUSIVENESS

The population targeted by the initiative—rural women and children under five—is among the nutritionally most vulnerable segments in the country, with the highest rate of stunting. The structures established as part of the initiative embrace a wide variety of stakeholders, with a special focus on community-level actors and bottom-up learning. The Community Lab meetings, Learning Journeys and open days bring together diverse actors from the community. The whole rationale behind the innovation was to give the community level participants an opportunity to voice their needs:

> *Yes, that was the ambition of the model that the community would have a stronger, united voice around what their priorities were and what their tailored, unique, specific problems were, and what their then tailored, unique, specific solutions would be for their own community. Like taking ownership over the problem. So they could all admit their complicity in the problem, but then also taking ownership over that solution-building that they were doing as well. (R8)*

The importance of local actors has also been recognised, as religious leaders, health extension workers and agriculture extension workers are increasingly part of the community-based nutrition activities considerations (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019e).

As a result of the interventions, the Seqota Declaration initiative was able to nurture a strong feeling of ownership, shared mission and sense of cohesion among a wide range of stakeholders. This was especially apparent in local-level ownership across sectors and the community:

> *In terms of ownership, we have achieved a tremendous change; at the initial stage, they used to think as it's not part of their normal roles and responsibilities. But now, even last time, we have witnessed that every woreda leader is leading the Seqota Declaration with the utmost attention. (R15)*

> *The Community Labs are enabling us to find the key challenges and also address those challenges using locally relevant and appropriate interventions that the community can come up with as a solution. So in terms of successes, I think the community's uptake has been great. […] They're responsible to do the assessment, the identification of the challenges and implementation of the intervention. Some of the Community Labs also do a work plan to mobilise the resources for interventions that are beyond the scope of their capacity. (R5)*

However, it has not been without some limitations. Some of these have been potentially limited focus on underlying power differences, stemming, for example, from status and gender, but also some crucial stakeholders have been either absent from the processes, or it was not established if they were there.

Community Labs may be susceptible to attract people that are already active in the community, and may not address social differentiation equally:

But these villages are so small, everyone knows everyone, and everyone knows who are the five and six people who attend all of the functions. So they know who are those handful of people that are going to be reliable and be able to attend something like this. You kind of end up having a group of people that have a bit of status in the community by default. (R8)

Interventions of the initiative address gender as a cross-cutting issue, although the implementations of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth has only made limited progress with promoting women's empowerment as established earlier. Furthermore, according to the Baseline Assessment findings, the majority of leaders at the woreda level were men, showing a gender imbalance in important power settings (FDRE, 2019). As for sectoral leadership, few were led by women, and those that were led by women were mostly considered as "soft offices", such as the Women and Children Affairs Office and Labour and Social Affairs Office (FDRE, 2019) To address these issues, a set of gender mainstreaming have been drafted, but the evidence does not show how these have been implemented since.

Furthermore, as established under section 5.2.2, private sector representatives have been mostly missing from the decision-making processes. Due to the scope of the research, it has also been difficult to establish to what extent are civil society organisations present at the more local levels. There is an indication of some international organisations' involvement at these levels, such as Save the Children International, that financially supported interventions identified by Community Lab participants but were beyond the scope of their capacity to implement (R5). However, it has been noted by Respondent 11 that the PDUs had to prioritise certain sectors over others and have not been engaging all the stakeholders from donors and partners. This is in line with the comment of Respondent 4, who notes that they have not been invited to any of the regional or national level review meetings.

8.2 RESPONSIVENESS

Responsiveness refers to "the ability of governments to observe and respond effectively and in a timely fashion to issues that are pressing in politics and society" (Termeer et al., 2015, p. 692) and is more focused on policy attention and policy change. Given that the most pressing issue has been identified as stunting, which is the core of the initiative, this is not expected to change. As such, it is also less susceptible to media attention, dramas and hypes that may dominate policy venues. On the other hand, responsiveness could be useful for assessing stakeholders' ability to navigate the information overload present in the country. Implementers need to address the changing needs of the target population, competing ideas among the stakeholders, new findings from research institutions, shifting attention from the global community, new technologies etc. As such, balancing the need to respond to the continuously inflowing inputs and novelties with the need for nurturing consistency and stability is where the capability of responsiveness can be observed.

The Program Delivery Units deal with competing needs and demands through focus and prioritisation (R11, R12, R9). Prioritisation is based on the goal and targets of the Seqota Declaration initiative, on the jointly developed plans that come from the woreda

level (R12) and on feedback from the community (R8). The goal of the initiative is a clear indication of this prioritisation; whilst malnutrition presents itself in a number of forms, the initiative strictly focuses on stunting.

> *I think in life we've learned one thing: the best chance of success is to have a focus. You can't achieve success or impact by spreading yourself too thin on too many issues […]. What we did was to diagnose the current situation in Ethiopia and identified that yes, there are issues of wasting and obesity. But stunting was a key issue that also had disparities across the country: some regions had a higher burden of stunting compared to others, some areas didn't have a high level of stunting. So we focused on the geographical inequalities and areas where we can have the most impact on the population. I think that's fair enough. (R9)*

To enable prioritisation based on the needs of the target population, the beneficiaries are given a voice through the Community Lab meetings and the joint woreda-based planning. Whilst the latter does not happen frequently, the former is supposed to happen every month. A key component of the Labs' work is to ensure the uptake of the findings at higher levels, although the overburdened nature of these coordinators raises some concerns about the uptake of the learnings during the scaling of the innovation.

> *What happened in effect is that the Kebele Administrator and the Woreda Administrator were quite close naturally. So the former would always be doing some reporting upward to the Woreda Administrator; their needs, or the minutes from their meetings, and things. Then the Woreda Administrator could kind of do some advocacy on their behalf at the higher levels. Then we also had our Regional Coordinator—who we learned very quickly was so overworked; because if you go from two labs to like 100 labs, that coordinator is doing nothing but travelling to the labs and doing monitoring and follow-up and support, and it's just a tiring job. So you really need quite a few of those coordinators. But anyway, that was another person who could kind of advocate on their behalf and make sure that they were in touch with what the community's priorities were. (R8)*

However, whilst prioritisation can focus down the number of emerging issues that need to be addressed, it does not eliminate the need for continuously assessing what will be addressed and what not. The structure has shown responsivity to pressure to change their course of action. The findings from the evaluation process can be seen to influence the practices, as actors actively seek improvements. For example, water and road were identified as the main issues by local stakeholders. Whilst this surprised the implementers, they took the feedback to heart, and have since prioritised resource mobilisation for water interventions (demonstrated by the endorsement from the African Development Bank) and also included the Ministry of Transport.

Furthermore, Respondent 11 notes that

> *After the process evaluation survey was conducted and feedback was given by the party, we did a massive kebele level coordination training, including all Kebele Admins, all the stakeholders, and we were practising more the multi-sectoral coordination plan at the kebele level. Because what we learned was that most of our planning time was wasted at the woreda and regional level, so we addressed the planning exercise at the kebele level after that evaluation. So, every Woreda Administrator is just compiling and coordinating the kebele level multi-sectoral plan and monitoring every mile as the performance of each*

sector. After that, it was very nice. The kebele level coordination is stronger than the woreda level after the training after the feedback was given. (R11)

The earlier mentioned excel-based monitoring was also introduced as a response to the process evaluation feedback findings (R11).

Toeing the line between prioritising certain issues whilst responding to emerging ones is a challenging task. In Ethiopia particularly, there seems to be constant pressure to innovate, participate in and embrace new ways of doing things. Respondent 1 notes that with the limited human resources, the eagerness or pressure to respond to emerging ideas keeps adding to the responsibilities of the already overwhelmed staff:

[…] seems to be a challenge of the development sector of more and more and more with the same people. I mean, just to give you a good example, all the flurry of activities that have come on board as a result of the UN Food Systems Summit activities. This time last year, we were not talking about the UN Food Systems Summit. Come November, December, the letter from the UN Secretary-General arrived. Since then, it's background paper, it is UN Food Systems Dialogue this and dialogue that. It has not come with additional human resource, it has just arrived. Somehow within the crevices in between the other things you fit it in. […] You do the best that you can, I guess, you try and prioritise, but yesterday's priority now you put behind because today's priority now has come upfront. But it's still on top of the plate of the person you were working with yesterday, so now they're wondering what your issues are. So it builds into the governance issues because it influences progress and the rate at which progress advances. (R1)

8.3 CONCLUSIONS

Through its structures and platforms, the Seqota Declaration contributed to enabling a wide range of community-level actors to voice their stance and have an influence. Those that are the most vulnerable and most impacted by the interventions seem to be present at these platforms, strengthening the initiative's moral and practical standing. However, based on the findings, the lack of social differentiation among participants, such as differences in status or gender, could limit this inclusivity.

While civil society actors may be less present and private sector actors are mostly absent from the processes, this does not seem to impact the fairness and equity of the platforms strongly. Rather, their absence could mostly have practical implications, such as limiting the uptake of the outcomes of these platforms. Civil society and private actors may have a better capacity to implement certain interventions than communities, and they can also bring further financial resources to the table. Connecting them with local initiatives could positively contribute to their sustainability.

Stakeholders within the initiative try to balance competing demands through the combination of prioritisation and also openness to emerging issues and seemingly possess a balanced level of responsiveness. The initiative's goal seems to be focused enough, and the community-driven needs assessment also supports focusing down competing interests, emerging issues, and who to include in decision-making processes. This latter is very important for inclusiveness; oftentimes, the more stakeholders are included, the less easy is to move forward. However, the prioritisation of a certain target population (children under five in rural areas) has led to some vulnerable groups not

being addressed, such as refugees living in refugee camps, urban populations and those suffering from overnutrition, making the initiative less inclusive. However, even if it sometimes means that not everyone is able to participate, not every idea is followed up and included; this seems to be a good strategy. The aforementioned groups may be addressed through different projects that focus more on those vulnerable populations and less on the target population of the Seqota Declaration initiative. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, too much responsivity can significantly undermine consistency and stability, and without consistency and stability, there will be no progress. On the other hand, focusing on the issue of gender more explicitly should be among the priorities, as it is an issue that most likely underlies differences between the target population, and not addressing it could undermine substantial progress.

There is an indication that regardless of the continuous prioritisation, the demands are so numerous that the responsiveness required to sufficiently address the most important ones is beyond the capacity of the stakeholders due to the limited human capital persistent through the nutrition structures. This shortcoming will be further discussed under section 9.2.

9 TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY & REVITALISATION

9.1 ENABLING AND LIMITING TRANSFORMATION

Falling into path dependence due to the repetition of the same solutions to the same problem has not been something present in the implementation of the Seqota Declaration initiative. At the core of the initiative is a strong aim to revitalise some of the mechanisms that have been proved problematic throughout the years. Stakeholders have particularly been welcoming to transformative change "it's almost like that's actually what everybody is crying for. Let's stop doing business as usual, let's be creative, let's be innovative" (R9). Actions for revitalisation have included innovations, champions and involving third eyes in policy processes.

Each of the **six innovations** addresses an observed problem with the aim of bringing in new ways of doing things. These include a number of strategies that can help unblock stagnation, such as establishing new structures, mechanisms, embracing new technologies, and so on.

To continuously animate people and keep up the momentum for change, **champions** and influential leaders are utilised at the federal, regional and local levels. These include Emama Turunba and Frealem Shibabaw, who are official champions of the Seqota Declaration and work together with the PDUs (FDRE & Big Win Philanthropy, 2019e). The PDUs have also trained religious leaders from churches in each kebele in the Seqota Declarations woredas to provide practical teachings on feeding during pregnancy and lactation. Apart from that, the Declaration has also received the highest level of political "buy-in" as well:

> *[...] the Seqota Declaration is owned by the Deputy Prime Minister. So that tells you something. Most of the time, such projects are normally coordinated by a Project Officer at the federal and regional levels. But the person who is responsible for coordinating this initiative is the Deputy Prime Minister at the federal level. At the regional levels is coordinated by the Regional Presidents, not officers, or bureau coordinator; it's coordinated by the Regional Presidents. And then there are also zonal and woreda level administrators. So, at every stage, the person who is responsible for coordinating and leading this initiative is the first person at that structure. (R15)*

As established previously, the Program Delivery Units were established to move more freely and have the ability to unblock stagnations through their access to the highest channels. The Program Delivery Units also contribute to upkeeping the momentum for continued engagement. This is crucial, especially in light of the competing parallel programmes, such as the Woreda Transformation Plan, which is also a capital intensive project (R15). Respondent 10 also echoes the role of the PDU in making sure the initiative is prioritised:

> *But if you look at what has been accomplished for five years, the delivery unit is pushing, they are getting the different ministries to continually think about this, to keep it front of mind. Ministers are constantly being asked to have this initiative or that initiative. I think one minister once told me they felt like a spider; all of their legs were being stretched in different ways on the web. And that's true, that's our day in and day out. So having*

someone that's at the centre of the delivery unit that can continue pushing forward, can sit on the different meetings on behalf of the different ministries and hold their visions, that's really where I see a successful delivery unit. (R10)

All the respondents have interacted with one of the PDUs at some point, and some have frequent interactions with them. Respondents note that the PDU is not only very open to constructive feedback from "**third eyes**" but are actively pursuing it:

They actually ask for comments, feedback or advice. They do want comments. […] I will say feedback definitely is much welcomed. (R9)

You know, sometimes it's just "sit in the meeting, and if you see something that you think we could do better tell us and I will do that". So it's both formal and informal. (R1)

[…] because the first five years came to an end, the management unit hired some consultants, and they have approached us and every other organisation that is somehow related to nutrition issues in the country and they developed quite an extensive questionnaire in which they were asking us what we think are the things that seem to work and what needs to be expanded. Based on the filled-in questionnaires, we had conversations, clarifying some of the answers. […] So, every year, they have an assessment, and they invite organisations like us to look at the reports and plans. This was quite a process in which they asked input from many organisations to provide advice. (R6)

However, some limitations bring into question the initiative's transformative capacity.

One recurring observation has been that whilst Ethiopia has several excellent policies, progress has been limited (R1, R6, R7, R8). A number of issues may be behind this. Respondents note the lack of continuity and enforcement (R6) and lack of contextualisation at the local level (R1) as some significant limitations.

So we are very involved in supporting the government in looking at the food system of Ethiopia, the gaps, potential improvements that can be made here. Now the interesting thing is that this country is no short of policies and strategies. It has the best. Yesterday, I made it a point: let us not fall into the trap that we have to invent new wheels. We have so much already. Instead of trying to invent new wheels, we better start driving the wheels that we already have. There are a lot of low hanging fruits that we can pick, but the gap in the food system is the actual implementation, enforcement and enactment of the policies that we have already. (R6)

We do a much better job of writing documents, and we are not able to implement what we write down. In my view, we need to do better at the implementation stage. […] if you look at the Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Strategy in Ethiopia, it's very comprehensive. It's essentially an a la carte menu of everything you could possibly do in Ethiopia. But depending on the setting that you are in nationally in the country, 90% of those things are useless, because they don't apply. So there is a need for very serious contextualisation at the local level. (R1)

A focus on "cascading down", "replicating", "trickling down" structures has also been very apparent across the key documents. Most of the programmes and policies provide information on the federal level governance structures, some briefly introduce the regional structures, but most references to the woreda and kebele level arrangements are usually minimal, even though implementation happens there. Respondent 8

confirms that there were no bottom-up mechanisms at the initial stages of implementing the Community Labs:

> *I think the Community Lab was initially started at the woreda level, and then it was kind of trickled down to the kebele level. And what we realised is that there was no mechanism for "trickling up". It was all trickle-down because that's the way the government had traditionally worked. So the idea was that the community is doing all of this learning process, reflection and trying to figure out what's going on. And then what's going to actually allow those things to go up? [...] what's the mechanism then for securing that funding and who's going to buy into the idea that they've identified a problem and the solution and that sort of thing? (R8)*

Another major limitation of the interventions has been time efficiency (R15, R13, R4, R3). The first part of the interventions was spent on raising awareness, setting up the different interventions, conducting the baseline evaluations and local planning. This led to the actual implementation starting at a later stage than planned:

> *For instance, I would say real implementation to the ground has started the last one to one and a half year; real practical level implementation, field-level follow up, field-level support, reaching targets, it happened recently. So I'd say that there is time pressure, and it's not according to the schedule. (R3)*

It also took a long time to mobilise resources (R4, R15, R13):

> *We couldn't do everything with the meagre resources that we had because initially, the government was not allocating a budget. It was almost last year (2011 EC) that they started allocating budgets. (R13)*

> *And in the last meeting, one of the challenges being frequently raised was associated with finance. The budgets have been allocated last June, but they have not been released till now. They said May. Those budgets are allocated for irrigation. So there are like four or five months in between. So financial liquidity, that's one of the major problems. (R15)*

However, above all (and probably underlying all), the two most mentioned limitations were financial and human resources.

Insufficient human resources: high turnover, low capacity, and understaffing have been noted as the major issues regarding human resources. High turnover leads to the need to reorient and re-engage the newcomers (R3), and if insufficient action is taken can break the whole chain of endorsement (R8), endangering project continuity. Concerns about capacity have been highlighted about the local extension staff and government officials. The former is not only overburdened but often don't have enough training to deliver nutrition messages (R2, R12). As for the latter, local level government officials do not have the capacity to contextualise the comprehensive national policies "passed down" to them (R1) and also lack the capacity to carry out routine monitoring and evaluation as established in section 7.2.

The local extension system, who are the core of delivering extension services to households, is particularly affected by understaffing:

[…] just by looking at the numbers: one development agent is responsible for how many farmers? Do you know those numbers? It could be up to 1000 farmers. Now, if you think about this one guy who has to visit each one of these farmers, if he visits 10 farmers a day, and he works five days a week, during one week he can reach 50 farmers, okay? It takes him 20 weeks, almost half a year, to reach every farmer one time; it's impossible. (R4)

Our biggest concern was that plans were there, but those plans were not effectively reaching the households. Most of the sectors have no frontline workers at the household level. The health sector has health extension workers at each kebele, agriculture has DAs—development agents—at kebeles, but these frontline workers are small in number and they are overburdened to reach all households and deliver the SBCC message. Stakeholders interested in the SBCC message deliver those interventions through just frontline workers, extension workers. Any other stakeholders who are interested in nutrition intervention use the same extension workers, and they are not able to reach all households, they are not able to cover the geographic areas they are allocated to. (R2)

Respondents also observe that regional governments were similarly overwhelmed by the accumulation of new and new responsibilities put on them (R1, R8, R4).

Understaffing is not necessarily due to the lack of interest in nutrition work. Respondent 7 highlights that there are professionals keen to work in the nutrition structure:

[…] it needs to recruit more. […] now we do have different nutrition graduates coming from different universities, and they don't have any job. […] There is no nutritional structure in different settings. In health, there is some, now, agriculture, they're starting. So to come to an action, we need to think of the human resource structure […]. (R7)

Insufficient financial resources: The Seqota Declaration has been a very capital intensive initiative, and closing the budget gap has been one of the major challenges. The initiative has achieved successes over time, such as mobilising resources from the government Treasury (R13), increasing buy-in from the community and contributions from development partners (R5) and acquiring an endorsement from the African Development Bank (R12). According to Respondent 13, in the last two years, the PDU mobilised more than 30 million USD from the government Treasury and have also mobilised more resources from the donor side. However, the majority of the participants still named insufficient financial resources as one of the most significant constraints, especially in light of the upcoming expansion phase and scaling:

The major challenge is obviously the financial aspects. (R15)

The resource base is so limited in comparison to the magnitude of need. […] you can see the way in which people are working, they actually want to make a difference. You do perceive a strong will to make a difference; both from development partners and the government entities. (R1)

And the budget allocated from the federal government is not enough even for water, let alone other sectors, for road or children and women's affairs or education or agriculture. (R12)

There's just not funding that goes into it, and not quick enough. (R4)

9.2 CONCLUSIONS

One of the initiative's strengths lies in its ability to nurture a strong feeling of ownership from the local to the national level. The Program Delivery Unit also invites external actors to provide inputs, opening up the opportunity for challenging path dependency. The initiative is also supported by the highest level of political leadership, along with a number of champions driving forward its momentum.

Oftentimes, bringing about transformative change is challenging due to rigid organisational structures, existing power relations, rigid adherence to norms and rules and resistance to change. This is not what the findings suggest for Ethiopia, where the policy process can be characterised by embracing new ideas, trying out new ways of doing and restructuring whenever necessary.

However, with the constant inflow of new ideas, establishment of new structures, and writing of new policies, a lot of innovation is present, but much less continuity and stability. A lot of time is lost keeping stakeholders up to date with the constant changes. Every time something new is started, a significant amount of time needs to be spent explaining how this differs from previous efforts, which then delays the implementation. By that time, there is already something new that emerges.

One may argue that this feature of aiming for the stars, being driven to innovate and bring about system change, backed up with insufficient human and financial resources to actually implement changes, coupled with a failure to contextualise at the local level, is what ends up causing some lock-in in the system.

10 CONCLUSION

10.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this thesis was to i) diagnose the Seqota Declaration against the key principles appropriate for food systems governance and ii) explore the presence or absence of governance capabilities necessary for achieving progress during the implementation of the Seqota Declaration. Table 9.1 gives a summary of these findings.

The findings show that each of the governance principles for food systems has been incorporated into the Seqota Declaration initiative, albeit to varying levels. As for the capabilities, the initiative's structures seem to possess all five capabilities to some extent, but some are more developed than others, and some may be stronger at different governance levels.

Table 9.1 Governance principles and capabilities

	Presence*	Strengths & limitations
System-based problem framing	Medium	*Holistic approach to malnutrition *Limited focus on system dynamics *Limited integration of nutrition
Reflexivity	High	*Connecting frames through a strong, jointly meaningful story *Establishment of structures that promote reflexive activities
Boundary-spanning structures	Medium	*Existence of structures that enable interactions among stakeholders *Limited third and private sector cooperation
Rescaling	Low	*Decentralised downward power *No alignment of short-term and long-term efforts
Adaptability	Medium	*Systematic and coordinated approach to M&E *Improved information sharing *Delayed outcome assessment *Limited capacity to use data
Resilience	Low to balanced	*Exploration and experimentation *Social protection *Weak observation
Inclusiveness	Medium	*Increased inclusion of most vulnerable *Limited social differentiation
Responsiveness	Balanced	*Balanced deployment of prioritisation and responsiveness *Limited human capital
Transformative capacity	Low	*Limited implementation and enforcement *Limited human and financial resources
Revitalisation	Balanced to high	*Innovations *Political will and leadership *Champions *Third eyes

*Governance principles were categorised as low, medium or high, and governance capabilities were categorised as low, balanced or high. The rationale behind the latter is that possessing any of the capabilities to a high level is not an ideal situation and brings its own traps.

Overall, the Seqota Declaration initiative is promising, but it does face a number of limitations that could undermine its successes in its implementation. Whilst resource constraint has been mentioned as a major impediment for progress, what is being done with the available resources should be an equally important consideration. Below is an outline of some of the areas that have emerged as limitations and where improvement could enable further progress.

Systems-thinking is present to some extent, but system dynamics are given less consideration.

The initiative's strength is in establishing a powerful, common goal that was able to cut across the siloes in which people have been working and mobilised a wide variety of stakeholders to embrace the initiative. Articulating what nutrition meant for each sector has proved useful. As such, the strategies and initiatives under the Seqota Declaration were able to address different components of the food system. However, it has not moved towards unearthing and leveraging deeper system dynamics at the time of this assessment. Considering feedback loops, synergies, trade-offs and leverage points are crucial parts of system-thinking, and there is a lack of consideration of these aspects in the initiative. This has been observed both through the principle of system-based problem framing and the capabilities of rescaling and resilience. Not considering such dynamics could have a harmful impact on the long-term sustainability of certain interventions.

Assessing system dynamics could not only contribute to improved system-based problem framing but could also enhance resilience, where weak observation is prevalent. It could also help connect the short-term humanitarian thinking and the long-term developmental approach prevalent in the country.

A high number of structures have been established to enable improved collaboration, but the people to fill or drive these are not there.

Inadequate governance structures have long been a concern for Ethiopia nutrition efforts, and most efforts have been spent on improving such structures. The Seqota Declaration initiative has successfully established a number of boundary-spanning mechanisms that have opened up opportunities for a less siloed and more holistic approach towards malnutrition.

Structures are indeed crucial for enabling multi-sectoral collaboration, but at the end of the day, structures are made up of people, and they will only be as good as those that are within them. Whilst the number of responsibilities to take on are increasing with every new structure that is established, the number of people to drive or participate in these structures is not increasing at the same speed. High staff turnover, low staff capacity (especially at the sub-national level) and overwhelmed stakeholders with a high amount of competing priorities could significantly limit the success of these structures. Whilst increasing consideration is being given to improving human capacity and capital, there is still a long way to go.

The Seqota Declaration initiative has demonstrated the power of strong agency. The Program Delivery Unit has been staffed by highly skilled experts, who have been able to

engineer significant progress even under a number of constraints they face. This small boundary-spanning mechanism consisting of a small group of people has been able to bring many stakeholders on board, mobilise an increasing amount of resources, respond to unforeseen challenges and balance a great deal of competing demands. These have been achieved through the combination of all five governance capabilities.

Focusing more on governance actors will be especially important in light of the upcoming structural changes under the Food and Nutrition Policy. These structural changes will address many of the ongoing criticism about the existing governance structures, which will open up a window of opportunity to achieve transformational change in the way food and nutrition are governed in Ethiopia. Ensuring that strong agency is there to drive this change will be crucial.

A high level of innovations are present, but their long-term sustainability may be questionable.

The Seqota Declaration innovations were designed to address major challenges that have been identified before the start of the implementation. At this stage, it is difficult to tell which innovations will be scaled and to what extent, but there is an indication of concern about the scalability of some of them. Whilst innovations are important to unblock potential stagnations, if they are not designed with scalability and sustainability in mind, they will not be able to bring about the desired change. As mentioned previously, Ethiopia is not necessarily short on new ideas and innovations. What has been missing seemingly is the continuity of such ideas and innovations, and ensuring that the building blocks to enable them are there.

Some of these building blocks of concern are the availability of water, roads, electricity, other infrastructure and human capital. Fortunately, the driving stakeholders of the Seqota Declaration initiative were able to uncover some of these issues over time due to community-based planning, which shows the importance of including communities in the planning processes. However, that was only some time into the implementation, and the Ministry of Transport still does not have strategic objectives, for example.

Assessing if interventions are feasible, scalable and sustainable before they are piloted could help ensure that they will be around in the long run. The constant pursuance of improvement without sufficient contextual grounding has led to discontinuing structures or innovations, with new structures and innovations taking their place rapidly. The accumulation of structures and ideas can lead to confusion and detachment among stakeholders.

Multi-sectoral coordination is owned and driven by government actors, but there is space for improvement for third sector and private sector inclusion.

The Seqota Declaration initiative is driven by government stakeholders, who have taken ownership of it and are actively championing it that helps keep up the momentum and ensure that the goal stays on the agenda among all the competing priorities government stakeholders face.

Whilst government leadership and ownership is crucial, it should not be exclusive. Large, international third sector stakeholders seem to be there at important meetings and actively provide input, but the coordination among themselves could be improved a lot and has a high cost for long-term development. Smaller, national or sub-national third sector stakeholders may not be much present at government fora, although the extent of this was not established due to limited data on sub-national cooperation. The private sector may be present in the discourse but is mostly absent from multi-sectoral cooperation.

Providing incentives for the private sector to join through a viable business case could open up a wide range of opportunities. Integrating the work of third sector stakeholders may help with identifying synergies between the work of humanitarian and development agencies, but also international and local agencies. Mapping all the stakeholders active in Ethiopia and their work in a centralised system could enable better integration. Improving third and private sector cooperation could not only allow for the alignment of short-term and long-term efforts but could also bring in some much needed human and financial capital.

10.2 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH

10.2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years, the "food systems approach" has become a buzzword, and more and more policymakers are expressing interest in applying it. Whilst research has been plenty on many aspects of food systems, food system governance is a relatively under-researched area, even though it could make or break achieving sustainable and inclusive food systems. There have only been a few conceptualisations of food systems governance to date, and those available have not applied these to different food systems arrangements in an in-depth way. This thesis contributed towards addressing this research gap by providing an in-depth empirical application of the food systems governance framework developed by Termeer et al. (2018). Given that Termeer et al.'s framework was the first that offered a diagnostic framework for food systems governance, it had limited operationalisation and practical application. Therefore, in order to enhance the diagnostic power of the aforementioned framework, it was combined with the governance capabilities framework aimed at addressing wicked problems (Termeer et al., 2015, Termeer & Dewulf, 2014), such as the ones that are prevalent in food systems.

A number of challenges have been faced during the operationalisation of the combined framework. Some of these included difficulties with addressing the great deal of overlaps not just between the combined principles and capabilities but within each of the frameworks as well. For example, the principle of transformative capacity has proven to be one of the most challenging principles to assess, given that it is an underlying principle that presents itself across all the different principles. Separating certain indicators according to the different principles and capabilities—such as redundancy, learning by doing, decentralisation, and flexibility, to name a few—has also been somewhat arbitrary. Whilst Appendix 1 outlines the guiding questions that

emerged from combining the two frameworks, these are not exhaustive of all the options that the frameworks have presented. Also, not all have been relevant for the case of the Seqota Declaration (especially those outlined under responsiveness), and different research may require a different combination of the questions. Furthermore, separating the dimensions of observation, acting and enabling has not necessarily proved crucial for this particular research.

Regardless of the challenges, the resulting combined framework shows some promise for future applications. The suggestions for moving forward with it are twofold.

First of all, there is a need to operationalise the combination of the two frameworks fully. This operationalisation should include a complete list of detailed indicators and guiding questions and more explicit explanation of why certain indicators belong to certain principles or capabilities. Furthermore, being less explicit about the three dimensions for the capabilities, and including constraining factors besides enabling ones could simplify and enhance the framework. For example, instead of dividing up each capability into observation, action and enabling conditions explicitly and potentially duplicating some indicators, these considerations could be underlying the whole research in a more implicit way. Characterising more the interaction between the different principles and capabilities would also be important. The transformative capacity also needs to be given more attention, as in its current state, this is more difficult to pinpoint than the others, especially because it is a cross-cutting principle. Being more explicit about what different levels of the other four principles and the five capabilities mean for an arrangement's transformative capacity could enhance the strength of this principle.

Secondly, the practical usefulness of either the framework or the results of its application needs to be given further consideration. Currently, the application of this framework is probably mostly possible by people who have more advanced knowledge of food systems. For example, assessing if an arrangement uses system-based problem framing requires an in-depth understanding of the different food system frameworks, elements, dynamics etc. Furthermore, the language heavily reflects theoretical concepts that may be less straightforward for people not intimate with governance literature. As such, it is primarily a scientific tool, and its practical usability for policymakers and other food systems actors is limited. Whilst scientists can still execute the research and share the results with other actors, there are two considerations to keep in mind. Firstly, scientists who carry out such research need to have intimate knowledge about the governance arrangement being researched and the environment it is embedded in. This could either be through involving scholars in the research that are knowledgeable on these topics or carrying out focus group discussions or in-depth interviews with key governance actors. Secondly, it would be essential to ensure that the way the results are communicated is tailored to the target audience. Therefore, food systems governance research needs to have some practical components, such as illustrating the framework through in-depth, detailed country case studies, and providing concrete, contextualised, detailed, feasible recommendations for action that actors could take, to ensure that those potentially able to drive food systems change are well informed to do so. Nevertheless, equipping stakeholders with some basic tools to learn about their food

system governance practices would still be useful to enable more frequent reflection. The latter would require the translation of the framework into a practical tool to be used by such stakeholders.

10.2.2 METHODOLOGY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research for this thesis was undertaken online. This has had implications for the methods that were selected and the way they were used.

A literature and document review were selected along with online semi-structured interviews as the main tools of this research. Whilst these have provided sufficient data triangulation and would have most likely been part of the research design regardless of the pandemic, being on the ground gives an opportunity to contextualise the findings and make the right conclusions from them. Fortunately, a scoping mission to Ethiopia prior to the pandemic enabled the acquisition of basic background knowledge about the Seqota Declaration initiative, the government structure in the country and thus helped the contextualisation and understanding of some of the findings.

Conducting the interviews online removed a personal touch that face-to-face interviews could have given and technical difficulties mostly due to problematic Internet connection also made it more challenging to conduct and complete some of the interviews without disruption. Notwithstanding the technical difficulties, the interviewees have shown a great deal of keenness and enthusiasm about being part of the research and have shared rich information about their experiences. The quality of data acquired from the online interviews could probably not have been improved if conducted face-to-face, except for those interviews where the connection was unstable.

The impact of the pandemic was felt not much in how the interviews were conducted, but more in who was able to be interviewed in the end. The majority of the interviews were conducted with actors residing at the national level due to language barriers and issues of accessibility on lower levels. Not being able to reach more sub-national level stakeholders has been a limitation of this research, especially as implementation happens there. Therefore, the representation of stakeholders may be skewed towards those that have better access to information, and thus the results may show a more positive picture than what the situation actually is like. Furthermore, whilst data saturation was seemingly achieved after the first 10 to 12 interviews, conducting interviews with representatives from the rest of the implementing sectors, such as the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth or lower-level implementers, could have potentially brought new issues to light. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to accessibility issues. To fill the gap, secondary research was used to identify the strength or limitations on the side of these stakeholders.

With respect to another limitation of this research is the acquisition of the most up to date information. Given the dynamically changing nature of the Seqota Declaration initiative in particular and the Ethiopian nutrition environment in general, the conflict in Tigray, or not having access to a more recent impact assessment or the most recent annual review findings, some of the findings may not reflect the current situation on the ground.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. GUIDING QUESTIONS

Based on Termeer et al. (2018), Termeer et al. (2015), Termeer & Dewulf (2014), Bortoletti & Lomax (2019), and Broto et al. (2019).

Table 1. System-based problem framing & reflexivity

Beyond one dimensional problem definition	To what extent does the initiative go beyond sectoral problem framing to apply system-based problem framing? To what extent do the interventions address different food systems elements, dynamics, trade-offs and promote a systemic approach to tackle food systems problems?
Reflexive observation	To what degree are one's own and other people's frames, and the process of framing and its effects reflected upon?
Reflexive action	To what extent have the variety of frames, issues, initiatives been integrated in a jointly meaningful story? What is the perception regarding shared power and decision-making, shared mission, conflict resolution, and a sense of cohesion?
Enabling reflexivity	To what degree are a combination of skills, resources and structures that could enable reflexive activities (e.g. deliberation processes, feedback mechanisms) present?

Table 2. Boundary-spanning structures & rescaling

Spanning siloed governance structures	What mechanisms are in place that connect policy domains, and enable interactions among public and private actors and across administrative divisions? How effective have they been in promoting a collaborative approach?
Scale-sensitive observation	To what extent are cross-level issues, interdependencies, fits and mismatches analysed and identified?
Scale-sensitive action	What strategies have been mobilised to address the cross-level and cross-scale issues?
Enabling scale-sensitivity	To what extent are openness for multiple scale logics, flexible institutions that create and recreate fit, and tolerance for redundancy and blurred responsibilities present?

Table 3. Adaptability & resilience

Adaptability	What monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place? To what extent is the action plan and its implementation being reviewed

	in collaboration with food systems stakeholders, information being shared, and lessons learned being undertaken?
Resilient observation	To what degree are weak signals observed and unexpected challenges considered?
Resilient action	To what degree do actors seek improvements and reflect on their practices, and have taken either robust or flexible adaptive measures or strategies when necessary? To what extent are actors engaging in experimentation and exploration?
Enabling resilience	What bridging arrangements (between different actors, networks, levels etc.) are present? To what extent are flexible legislations that allow for decentralising decision-making authority and room for self-organisation present?

Table 4. Inclusiveness & responsiveness

Inclusiveness	To what extent do private actors (especially marginalised groups or individuals) and/or civil society organisations actively participate in decision-making processes? What is the level of support received from stakeholders? What is the degree to which members perceive being individually empowered to effect change (e.g., to influence policy and practice in their home agencies and in the community)?
Observing the need for responsiveness	To what extent has an analysis been carried out identifying the most pressing demands and the needs of the most vulnerable?
Responsive action	To what extent have policymakers addressed pressing concerns?
Enabling responsiveness	What strategy, monitoring system, resources do policymakers have at their disposal to monitor attention and address pressing concerns?

Table 5. Transformative capacity & revitalisation

Transformative capacity	What is the level of resistance to transformative change? To what extent are resources available to facilitate transformative change (financial, human)?
Observing the need for revitalisation	To what extent does deliberation happen with the input of qualified, independent actors (third eyes)?
Action for revitalisation	What strategies are in place to overcome the path dependencies and lock-ins identified through observation?

	Who are the champions of the initiative? To what extent are they able to animate people and facilitate interactions? What deliberate uses of experiments or ideas that seek to challenge the existing landscape of established policies, technologies or social practices have been applied (if any)?
Enabling revitalisation	To what extent are actors willing to step out of their comfort zone, challenge conflict aversion and are ready to introduce third eyes?

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Analysing food systems governance in Ethiopia: The case of the Seqota Declaration initiative

Interview guide

**The sections in italics are part of the interviewer's narrative and aim to nurture a shared understanding.*

**Throughout this interview, the interviewer will use the phrase "Seqota Declaration stakeholders". This refers to everyone who is involved in and is affected by the initiative. Therefore, these stakeholders can be donors, ministries, implementing partners, civil society organisations, communities, private actors, etc.*

Background information

1. Please briefly tell me about yourself, your position, your organisation and your background.
2. How do nutrition concerns play a role in your work and domain?
3. Could you tell me more about your role in relation to the Seqota Declaration, please?

System-based problem framing & reflexivity

There is a general agreement that ending malnutrition is important, but there tends to be disagreement about the way this goal could be achieved. Some believe nutrition-sensitive interventions should be given more resources, others believe health-specific programmes need more focus, and there are those that believe increasing production is key.

4. To what extent have you witnessed differing perspectives on the causes of and solutions to malnutrition among Seqota Declaration stakeholders?
5. To what extent does sectoral bias exist in the policy process related to the Seqota Declaration (for example in agenda setting, decision-making, implementation)?

    a. *This could be in relation to who is leading the implementation, what gets funded, who has the most power, what issues are neglected, etc.*

    How are you enabled or constrained to voice your opinion and challenge different perspectives?

Multi-stakeholder governance

6. Through what formal or informal mechanisms do you interact and collaborate with other Seqota Declaration stakeholders?

    a. *Examples: coordination schemes (e.g. Nutrition Coordinating Body), public-private partnerships, participatory data collection and analysis, WhatsApp*

How effective have they been in promoting the harmonisation of efforts and bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders?

Adaptability & resilience

7. In what way are you involved in the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms related to the Seqota Declaration strategic objectives and initiatives, if any?

8. How are the activities of the Seqota Declaration able to mitigate the impact of emergency situations on nutrition *(such as COVID-19, droughts, pest outbreaks, internal conflicts, climate change)*?

   To what extent is the nutrition governance system able to predict such events? What enables or constraints actors to take action against such challenges?

Participation & responsiveness

9. In what ways are private actors (such as marginalised groups or individuals, but also private companies) and civil society organisations (especially local ones) enabled to participate in dialogues and policy processes related to Seqota Declaration efforts?

Some critiques note that nutrition efforts in Ethiopia seem to focus on undernutrition, although overweight and obesity rates are increasing. The initiative also focuses more or rural households, and does not seem to address conflict-affected, urban or displaced populations.

10. To what extent is the initiative able to tackle unlimited demands and concerns from a wide range of stakeholders (both internal and external) in a balanced manner?

    What societal issues related to nutrition should receive more attention as part of the Seqota Declaration, if any?

Transformative capacity

11. What is the level of resistance to transformative change and where is it most present?

Scale conflicts

12. In what ways have you experienced tensions between local and national level governance, if any?

    a. *Where does the power lie? Who is involved, who decides? How collaborative is decision-making? Top-down, bottom-up, mixed?*

    How did you handle them? How were you enabled or constrained to act against the challenges?

13. In what ways have you experienced tensions between short-term/long-term solutions in relation to the initiative, if any?

a. *Example: allocating resources for emergency activities versus long-term development activities OR safety nets, incomes, livelihoods versus climate change, environmental conditions and economic growth*

How did you handle them? How were you enabled or constrained to act against the challenges?

APPENDIX 3. SEQOTA DECLARATION STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

The table below outlines the strategic objectives (10) and strategic initiatives of the Seqota Declaration initiative. The table has been developed based on Karanja Odhiambo et al. (2019).

Strategic objective 1	**Improve the health and nutritional status of adolescents, mothers and children under two years of age through nutrition-specific interventions**
Strategic initiative 1.1	Implement Community-Based Nutrition (CBN) programme
Strategic initiative 1.2	Develop and implement multi-channel social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) campaign
Strategic initiative 1.3	Strengthen complementary feeding programmes
Strategic initiative 1.4	Scale up school health and nutrition services
Strategic initiative 1.5	Increase services at community and facility levels
Strategic initiative 1.6	Scale up early detection and management of acute malnutrition and common childhood illnesses services
Strategic initiative 1.7	Strengthen the delivery of nutrition-smart health interventions among adolescents, women and children
Strategic objective 2	**Ensure 100% access to adequate food all year round**
Strategic initiative 2.1	Increase production and consumption of fruit and vegetables
Strategic initiative 2.2	Increase production and consumption of staple crops and pulses
Strategic initiative 2.3	Increase production and consumption of milk and dairy products
Strategic initiative 2.4	Increase production and consumption of meat and meat product foods
Strategic initiative 2.5	Increase production and consumption of poultry and poultry-product foods
Strategic initiative 2.6	Increase production and consumption of fish and fish-source foods
Strategic initiative 2.7	Increase production and consumption of honey and honey products
Strategic initiative 2.8	Improve animal feed provision
Strategic initiative 2.9	Improve animal health services
Strategic objective 3	**Transform smallholder productivity and income**
Strategic initiative 3.1	Establish 20-hectare AITECs
Strategic initiative 3.2	Establish 0.5 – 1.0-hectare satellite demonstration centres
Strategic objective 4	**Ensure zero post-harvest food loss**
Strategic initiative 4.1	Create market opportunities for agricultural products
Strategic initiative 4.2	Introduce modern post-harvest technologies
Strategic objective 5	**Enhance innovation around the promotion of sustainable food systems (climate-smart)**
Strategic initiative 5.1	Establish Bank of Water Technologies and Solutions
Strategic initiative 5.2	Increase irrigated areas coverage
Strategic initiative 5.3	Increase areas treated with physical and biological soil and water conservation

Strategic initiative 5.4	Increase access utilisation and coverage of renewable energy sources
Strategic objective 6	**Ensure universal access to water supply sanitation and adoption of good hygiene practices**
Strategic Initiative 6.1	Increase safe and adequate water supply coverage
Strategic Initiative 6.2	Increase sanitation coverage
Strategic Initiative 6.3	Promote hygiene practices
Strategic initiative 6.4	Scale up school WASH programme
Strategic initiative 6.5	Establish Tekeze River Basin Authority
Strategic objective 7	**Improve health and nutrition status of school children**
Strategic initiative 7.1	Promote home-grown School Feeding programme
Strategic initiative 7.2	Scale up School WASH programme
Strategic initiative 7.3	Scale up implementation of School Health and Nutrition programme
Strategic objective 8	**Improve nutrition status of pregnant and lactating women and children through PSNP interventions**
Strategic initiative 8.1	Scale up PSNP4 to cover more woredas in the Tekeze River Basin
Strategic initiative 8.2	Promote the implementation of gender-sensitive social safety net programmes
Strategic initiative 8.3	Promote the provision of credits, grants, microfinance services and other income-generating initiatives
Strategic initiative 8.4	Increase access to basic nutrition services for all vulnerable groups
Strategic initiative 8.5	Scale up Tigray's Social Cash Transfer programme
Strategic objective 9	**Improve gender equity, women empowerment and child protection**
Strategic initiative 9.1	Increase economic empowerment of women
Strategic initiative 9.2	Increase social empowerment of women
Strategic initiative 9.3	Increase community awareness of and participation in gender equity and child protection
Strategic initiative 9.4	Promote child protection
Strategic objective 10	**Improve multisector coordination and capacity**
Strategic initiative 10.1	Integrate nutrition into sector work plan at all levels
Strategic initiative 10.2	Establish/strengthen nutrition coordination body structure at all levels
Strategic initiative 10.3	Stakeholders engagement and resource mobilisation
Strategic initiative 10.4	Design and implement a robust M&E system
Strategic initiative 10.5	Implement first 1,000 days plus social movement
Strategic initiative 10.6	Establish CL at woreda levels
Strategic initiative 10.7	Strengthen PDUs to perform effectively