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Building Capacities to Strengthen Food Systems Transformation & Mentorship Support in India

Strengthening Systems | Enabling Convergence | Driving Collective Action



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India's Food Systems at a Turning Point

India's food systems are at an inflection point. Two decades of gains in production and availability now run up against stubborn challenges—undernutrition, climate stress, soil degradation and fragmented markets. These issues demand a shift from isolated sectoral responses towards an integrated food system approach that connects agriculture, nutrition, health, livelihoods, climate resilience and governance.

The Case for Food Systems Transformation in India

56.4% of India's disease burden is linked to unhealthy diets (ICMR)

USD 17.7 billion worth of food is lost annually due to post-harvest inefficiencies, including 49.9 million metric tonnes (MT) of horticulture losses (NABCONS)

Despite producing 357 million tonnes of food, India ranks 102/123 on the 2025 Global Hunger Index—highlighting a food systems challenge, not a production one

Food systems governance spans more than eight central ministries, leading to fragmented policies and limited convergence

86% of India's farmers are small and marginal holders, facing low bargaining power, climate vulnerability, and unstable incomes

The Global Programme for Food Systems Transformation (GP TES), commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development under the Special Initiative "Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems (SI AGER)", supports Transformative Initiatives across five countries to advance healthier, sustainable and inclusive food systems.

In India, TES has been supporting the Coalition for Food Systems Transformation in India (CoFTI) since 2023. Emerging from the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit process, CoFTI is a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together government, academia, civil society and the private sector to advance collective action for food systems transformation guided by the India Food System Vision Report 2030.

Objective

The initiative aims to strengthen the capacities of key actors who shape food systems in India—policy leaders, system conveners and frontline practitioners—to drive equitable, sustainable and nutrition-sensitive transformation.

The approach aligns with India's Food Vision 2030 and promotes:

- Systems thinking and convergence
- Adaptive leadership and collaborative governance
- Evidence-informed decision making
- Continuous learning and peer exchange
- Localised action linked to national priorities

Rather than focusing on stand-alone interventions, the initiative promotes integrated and scalable approaches that strengthen institutions, partnerships and implementation ecosystems.

A Holistic Capacity-building Architecture

A distinguishing feature of the India TES initiative is its multi-tiered and integrated capacity-building framework that works simultaneously across policy, institutional and community levels to create systemic change.

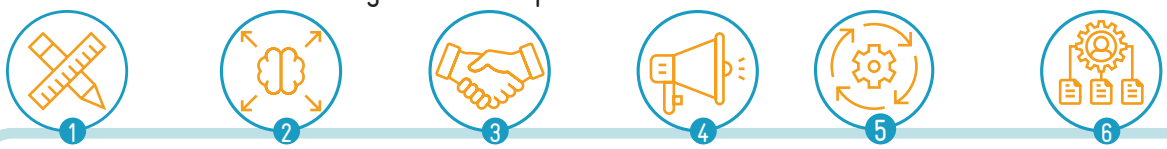
The programme builds capacities across three primary stakeholder groups, recognising their complementary roles in transformation, namely:

CoFTI coalition: Strengthened for systems thinking, cross-sector engagement, and narrative-building through consultative workshops, peer learning exchanges, reflection circles, leadership labs, and immersive field visits. This coalition serves as the "engine room" for framing problems systemically and mobilising diverse partners.

Government functionaries: Equipped to apply an integrated food systems lens in policy and programme delivery via classroom sessions, real-world case discussions, micro-learning modules and scenario-based simulations. The focus is on convergence-oriented governance and implementation at scale.

Community and frontline actors in Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh: Supported to operationalise on-ground integration across agriculture, nutrition, markets using on-site trainings, participatory sessions (role plays, problem-solving, skills), convergence planning workshops and user-friendly job aids in local languages.

The initiative's curriculum integrates six capacities:



1. **Design Capacity** to plan a transformative agenda
2. **Knowledge Capacity** to access, generate and adapt knowledge to local systems
3. **Partnership Capacity** to build coalitions and networks
4. **Advocacy Capacity** to drive behaviour change and collective action
5. **Implementation Capacity** to deliver and iterate effectively
6. **Resource Capacity** to mobilise and steward resources for sustainability

Together, these capacities help create leadership and institutional ecosystems that can sustain transformation over time.

Mentorship and continuity: Learning extends beyond training cycles through structured mentorship, peer learning forums and webinars. A feedback loop enables continuous adaptation to participant needs.

To institutionalise learning, the initiative will design and manage a learning management system (LMS) and digital repository—an open, living reference for food systems transformation in India. This platform will curate tools and case studies, host micro-courses and enable communities of practice that connect national and local actors. It will support continuous learning, documentation of practices, and knowledge exchange among stakeholders and across geographies.





Key features

Systems-first, convergence-driven: Moves from siloed programmes to coordinated action across agriculture, health, WASH, education and markets—immediately relevant to countries facing similar fragmentation.

Role-tailored capacity architecture: Combines universal competencies (SBC, knowledge management) with role-specific capabilities (design for policymakers, implementation for frontline workers), ensuring uptake and durability.

Institutionalisation through LMS: Preserves institutional memory, scales access to quality learning and fosters cross-level collaboration—critical for sustaining transformation beyond project cycles.

Narrative-building and coalitioning: Strengthens multi-actor platforms (e.g., CoFTI) to align incentives, coordinate efforts and maintain momentum—transferable to other national ecosystems.

By pairing national visioning with grassroots problem-solving and by investing in people and institutions rather than single-point solutions, the TES in India demonstrates a practical pathway to food systems transformation. Its blend of systems thinking, convergence governance, experiential learning and digital institutionalisation offers a replicable template for initiatives seeking impact that is equitable, scalable and sustained.