From Concept to Action:

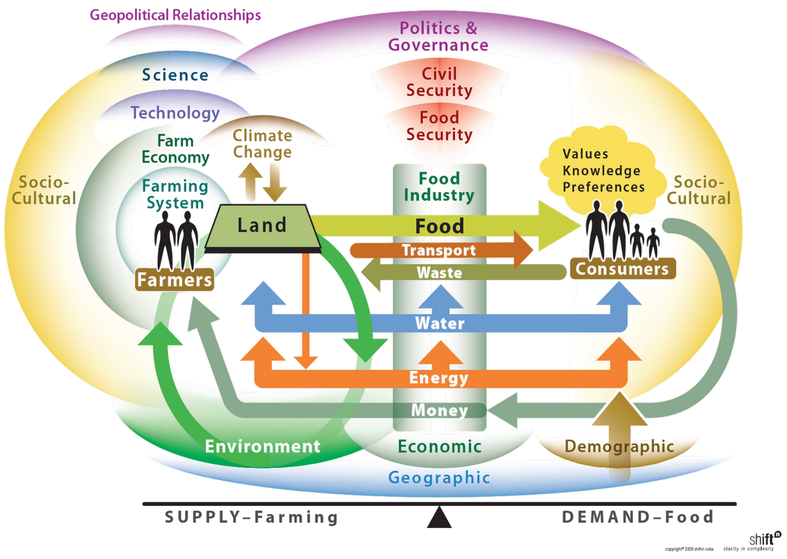
Malawian Stakeholder Voices on Food Systems for One Health (FS4OH)

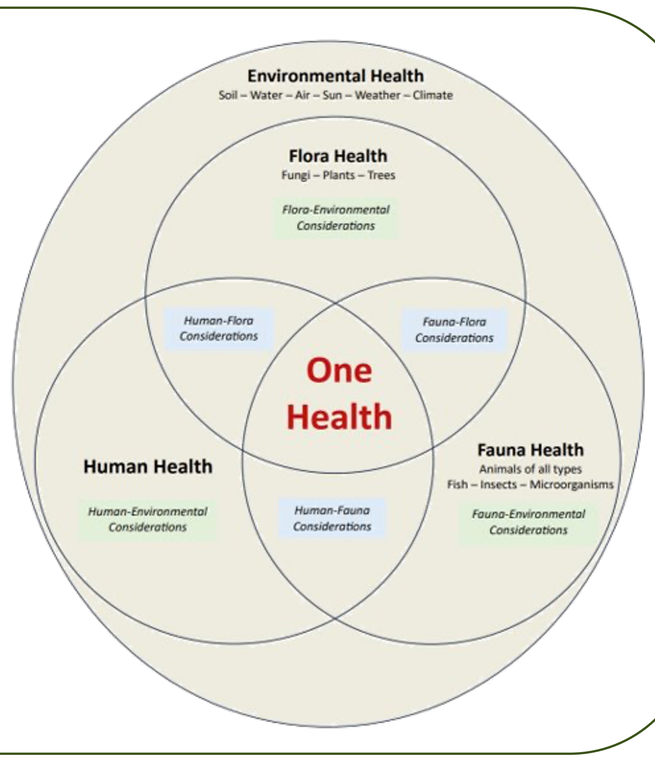
- Malawi faces high rates of poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and environmental degradation, making integrated food system solutions crucial.
- This qualitative research explores how stakeholders at different governance levels in Malawi understand and apply FS4OH concepts, aiming to inform better, more holistic policies and practices for human and environmental health.

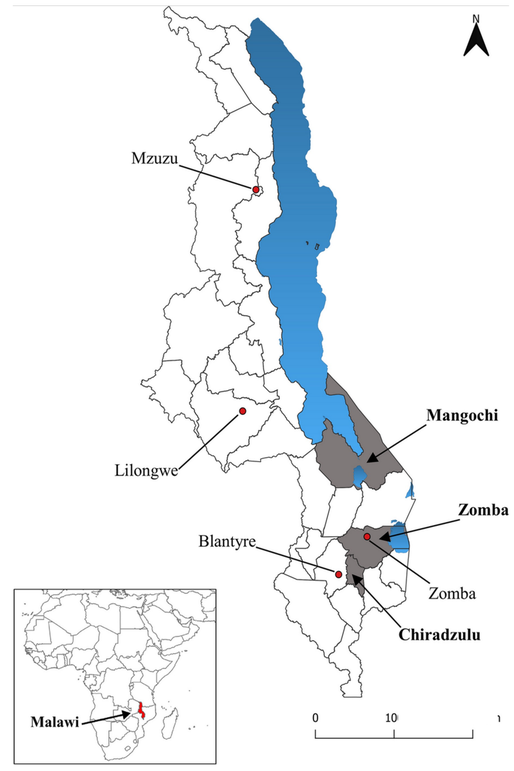
FOSTA

Food systems transformation in Southern Africa for One Health

FS4OH recognises the interconnected health of people, animals, plants, and ecosystems across all stages of the food system.

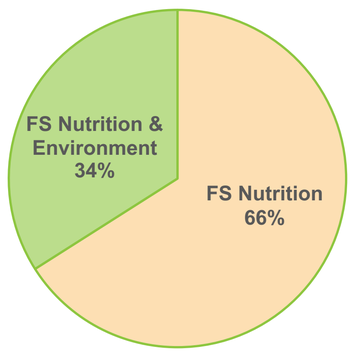


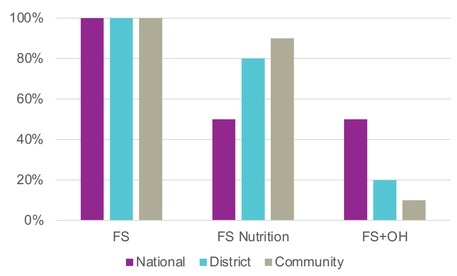




Research Q1: How do FS stakeholders in Malawi conceptualize "FS4OH"?

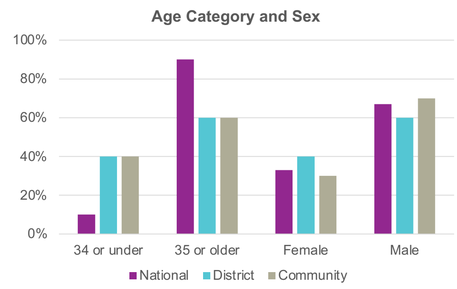
1. **66% viewed FS4OH as focusing on human health and nutrition, with little mention of environmental links.**
   - Many stakeholders—despite working in related fields and having tertiary education—struggled to articulate all components of FS4OH, possibly due to the interview format and short duration.
2. **34% described FS4OH connecting environmental health (soil, water, flora/fauna) with human health.**
   - 50% of those who fully articulated FS4OH were younger, at the district/community level, and in diverse sectors beyond agriculture (e.g., community development, environment, human rights).
   - Remaining participants had strong backgrounds and degrees in agriculture, combined with environment or nutrition experience.
3. **Post-interview discussions with handouts appeared to improve mutual understanding.**





Research Q2: How do FS stakeholders utilize the FS4OH concept in their work?

1. **Respondents mainly focus on ensuring the food system delivers adequate nutrition.**
   - Some hesitancy to adopt FS4OH exists due to sectoral misalignment and perceived mismatch with organizational mandates.
2. **Others explained how they use FS4OH, but not using the term FS4OH.**
   - Many initially underestimated the extent of FS4OH integration in their roles, and additional connections emerged among those in environmental roles (soil, water, forestry) and sectors like trade, governance, and law enforcement.
3. **Many emphasized collaborative, multisectoral efforts leveraging diverse strengths rather than all stakeholders acting comprehensively alone.**
   - FS4OH is most effective as part of a collaborative ecosystem, transcending strict sectoral boundaries.
   - Existing documents and practices help expand cross-sector engagement, with regular stakeholder interaction key to wider FS4OH dissemination.



Research Q3: Possibilities and Limitations of FS4OH for Advancing Initiatives

1. **Clear advantages of FS4OH, including improved human and environmental health, increased food security, and enhanced learning outcomes.**
   - FS4OH fosters multi-sectoral coordination, promoting synergies, resource sharing, and reduced costs (although others felt it would increase costs).
2. **Challenges: lack of understanding of FS complexity, resistance to systems thinking, and oversimplification of FS as agriculture/consumption.**
   - Political preferences for simple solutions (e.g., fertilizer subsidies) hinder sustainable systemic change; politicians were described as "gatekeepers" resisting deeper reforms.
   - Well-resourced groups were perceived as prioritizing cheap, high-quantity food and profits over quality and sustainability.
   - Coordinating stakeholders is difficult, requiring patience and significant resources; funding often targets single issues rather than integrated solutions.

Conclusion & Key Take-Home Messages:

The study underscores FS4OH's value despite varying terms used to describe food systems that are healthy for people and the planet.

1. **Embrace Diverse Perspectives:** Stay open to a variety of ways of understanding what it means to be healthy for both people and the planet. Diversity is a powerful asset, and every stakeholder brings unique expertise and lived experience to the table.
2. **Engage in Ongoing Dialogue:** Actively participate in regular conversations with a wide range of stakeholders. Collaborative dialogue is essential for building stronger, more resilient food systems together.
3. **Respect Different Approaches:** Be mindful not to impose your own views or solutions on others. Instead, listen, learn, and support approaches that honour the needs and perspectives of all involved, while also sharing your own experiences.

Study Design:

Guiding questions and prompts for interviews designed to be brief and conducted near to homes/work for convenience.

Post-interview FS+OH discussions with handouts for district & community level.

Anonymised records transcribed verbatim using Otter.ai and manually checked.

Integrated inductive and deductive codes and grouped into themes in MaxQDA.

Analysed considering reflexivity/researcher bias, with second opinion on codes.

41 diverse stakeholders interviewed

National (20), district (10) & community extension (10) levels.

- ❑ National-level via Zoom in Lilongwe, Zomba, and Blantyre.
- ❑ District & community face-to-face in Mangochi and Zomba, where the FoSTA-Health project is active through CARE Malawi.
  - District offices at the "Boma", the governance centre.
  - Community in Traditional Authorities (TAs):
    - TA Lungwena in Mangochi, TA Nkhagula in Zomba.
    - TAs selected to avoid previous FS4OH interactions.
- ❑ 17 sectors were represented, with 8-9 sectors at each level of governance.
- ❑ More males & adults (see table to the left), achieved
  - 40% youth at the district and extension level.
  - 40% females at district level.
- ❑ The national level had more degrees and experience, as highlighted in green in the table below.

Tertiary	National	District	Extension
None	0%	0%	10%
Diploma	0%	10%	70%
Bachelor's	19%	70%	20%
Master's	62%	20%	0%
PhD	19%	0%	0%
Experience	**National**	**District**	**Extension**
01 to 10 yr	33%	70%	50%
11 to 20 yr	52%	20%	20%
21+ years	14%	10%	30%

Historical evolution of "FS" & "OH"

Year	OH	FS	FS+OH
Ancient	Indigenous Knowledge	Indigenous Knowledge	Indigenous Knowledge
300	Hippocrates		
1800	Zoonosis		
1900	Soil Health One Medicine		
1930		Supply chains	
1970		Limits to growth	Permaculture Design
1990		FS	
2000			IFOAM (organics) ILRI (livestock
2004	OH		
2010			Universities
2020			UK, EU, UN

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- Food Systems Transformation in Southern Africa for One Health (FoSTA-Health) https://fosta-health.eu
- Kulima Integrated Development Solutions https://kulima.com/

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