POLICY BRIEF

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Building climate-resilient and nutrition-secure food systems in the Philippines

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Executive Summary

The issue: The Philippines faces intersecting climate and nutrition challenges, including extreme weather, rising temperatures, flooding, sea-level rise, and a triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising overweight and obesity. Environmental degradation and a nutrition transition toward ultra-processed, low-diversity diets compound these risks.

Why it matters: The convergence of climate and nutrition challenges risks reversing decades of progress in food security, public health, and rural development. Fragmented climate and nutrition policies dilute effectiveness and impact and waste limited resources. Integrating these agendas is not only efficient: it's essential to protect people from overlapping risks. Integrating climate change and nutrition strategies can multiply benefits: improving dietary quality, reducing emissions, strengthening farmer livelihoods, and lowering healthcare costs. The Philippines stands to gain significantly by aligning these priorities within national and local strategies.

Key recommendations:

1. Operationalize four opportunity domains in food system interventions through coordinated national and local action:

- Promote consumption of diverse, fresh, and safe foods;
- Regulate the promotion of unhealthy foods;
- Phase out the sachet economy and reduce plastic pollution;
- Support climate-smart production and value chains for healthy foods.

2. Strengthen integrated governance through a "bibingka" approach

Apply a "bibingka" approach[i] by simultaneously pursuing top-down and bottom-up actions across policy, planning, implementation, and monitoring — meeting in the middle to achieve concrete, coordinated results.

Top-down action should focus on formalizing policy coherence, specifically through strengthening interagency coordination at a national level.

- Key clusters and departments with expertise to include are the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Environment & Natural Resources (DENR), Climate Change Commission (CCC), National Nutrition Council (NNC) and civil society.
- Such an interagency alignment group should have clear terms of reference, mandate, framework and budgetary backing for sustained operation. A joint memorandum circular could provide an avenue to standardize procedures, define leadership responsibilities, and agreement on metrics, output, and result indicators.

Bottom up action provides opportunity to strengthen existing strategies, prioritize local contexts and improve uptake through strong communication and capacity building.

- A key avenue for bottom up action includes engaging local governments and communities and linking Local Government Units (LGUs) to academia and research.
- The strongly developed Local Climate Change Action Plans within the Philippines also offer an opportunity to integrate climate-nutrition objectives in local policies.

3. Align financing and resources

Strengthening avenues to align resources across agencies is essential to amplify impact on these cross-cutting challenges. Strategies for this include:

- Implement convergence budgeting to align resources across agencies.
- Prioritize climate adaptation and nutrition investments with support from development partners.
- Strengthen data sharing and monitoring by converging datasets, developing shared, or at least aligned, MEL frameworks.
- Establish an external accountability group to track implementation and resource use.

Call to action: **Urgent, coordinated action with clear leadership and political buy-in is necessary to achieve robust food system outcomes for climate and nutrition in the Philippines.**

A high-level policy roundtable could serve as an initial catalyst to align government agencies. These should also involve LGUs, development partners, the education sector, and civil society. Platforms such as the NNC (with the Scaling Up Nutrition Multi-Stakeholder platform) or the CCC have strong mandates to serve as potential conveners to initiate concrete multi-level, multi-sector actions.

At the same time, it is essential to recognize that efforts should strike a balance between climate-nutrition double wins and interventions that primarily deliver significant climate or nutrition benefits, ensuring that critical single-issue gains are not overlooked. Integrated action can maximize impact and value for money, but not every effective solution will sit neatly within the climate-nutrition nexus.

Background and context

The Philippines faces very high exposure to climate risks, ranking 8th globally on the Climate Risk Index (1993-2022), with impacts projected to rise through 2100.[ii] Mean temperatures could increase by up to 2.9 °C, seasonal rainfall is expected to exceed historical averages by about 40%, and typhoons are projected to grow in intensity and frequency.[iii]

Flooding threatens key rice and vegetable production zones, while sea-level rise, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion endanger coastal and freshwater fisheries, potentially displacing around one million people.[v] Simultaneously, the country faces a triple burden of malnutrition[v] —undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising overweight and obesity, which currently affects nearly 40 % of adults and contributes to the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases.[vi] Environmental degradation from agriculture and fisheries, including habitat loss, forest conversion, and greenhouse gas emissions, further undermines food system resilience.[vii] These pressures are compounded by a nutrition transition toward simpler, less diverse, energy-dense diets, with declining fruit and vegetable consumption and rising intake of ultra-processed foods, while safe and nutritious foods remain inaccessible or unaffordable for many households.[i,ix]

Additionally, plastic pollution is a significant issue within the Philippines as the world's number one producer of plastic waste, largely coming from the food & beverage sector through the sachet economy.[x,xi]

These intersecting climate, environmental, and dietary challenges, alongside limited integration of climate and nutrition policies, underscore a critical opportunity to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of Philippine food systems.

Key challenges and barriers

Despite the growing recognition of the linkages between climate and nutrition in the Philippines, there are several barriers that hinder their effective integration and limit coordinated action towards climate- resilient and nutrition-secure communities.

BARRIER	DESCRIPTION AND IMPLICATION
Policy and institutional fragmentation	Limited policy alignment and leadership hinder action on climate-nutrition integration, making it difficult to implement coherent strategies across sectors and agencies.
Limited funding and resources	Insufficient financing and misaligned budgets constrain joint initiatives, limiting the scale and sustainability of interventions that link climate adaptation and nutrition outcomes.
Data gaps and weak monitoring	Lack of common metrics, data convergence, and limited monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems reduce evidence-based planning and tracking of progress.
Limited local engagement and communication	Strategic communication gaps and insufficient involvement of local government units (LGUs) reduce awareness, uptake, and effectiveness of programs at the community level.
Low awareness and capacity at community and farmer level	Communities and farmers often have limited awareness of and/or capacity to act on the links between climate change and nutrition, which constrains the adoption of climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive practices.
Commercial determinants and dietary inequality	High prices of nutritious, climate-adapted foods, emphasis on staple or high-value crops, and persistent social inequalities limit access to healthy, diverse diets, reinforcing nutrition and health disparities. This is exacerbated by the sachet economy, where small quantities (often associated with ultra-processed and nutrient-poor foods, e.g., 3-in-1 coffee[xii]) are sold in disposable packets. While sachets make products affordable and accessible in the short term, they increase long-term costs for consumers, are the primary source of plastic pollution, and crowd out healthier or fresh alternatives.[xiii]

To achieve coordinated results, the bibingka approach applies a strategy of simultaneously pursuing top-down and bottom-up actions, much like the traditional Filipino rice cake that is cooked with fire both above and below the dough.

Opportunities

Several entry points exist to strengthen policy coherence, scale local impact, and advance climate-nutrition integration in the Philippines.[xiv] These build on successful models, such as FRESH, AMIA villages, KADIWA, Integrated School Nutrition Model, Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP) Quezon City's alignment of food procurement policies with the Planetary Health Diet. They are also guided by national frameworks such as the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition 2023-2028 (PPAN) led by the NNC, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP), and the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP), four opportunity domains provide actionable pathways for multi-sectoral, multi-agency efforts:

Opportunity 1: Promote consumption of diverse, fresh and safe foods

Increase the availability, affordability, and appeal of diverse, fresh and safe nutrient-rich foods. This addresses gaps in healthy diet demand and supports climate-resilient food systems by promoting agricultural biodiversity, local production of climate-adapted crops, and reduced reliance on resource-intensive ultra-processed foods.

Opportunity 2: Regulate promotion of foods unhealthy for people and planet

Reduce consumption and marketing of ultra-processed, unhealthy foods to prevent non-communicable diseases and diversify diets, while lowering reliance on staples such as sugar, maize, and wheat.

Opportunity 3: Reduce plastic pollution and quit the "sachet economy"

Address plastic waste from ultra-processed products and single-use packaging, which contributes to environmental degradation, food system vulnerability, and higher greenhouse gas emissions from plastic manufacture and waste disposal.

Opportunity 4: Support climate-smart production and value chains for healthy foods

Strengthen local food supply chains to improve nutrition, enhance rural and urban resilience, and support sustainable livelihoods through climate-smart agriculture, landscape management, value-chain development, and the use of downscaled climate risk assessments.

Policy options

There are several actionable entry points for both stronger policy coherence and immediate local impact in the Philippines.

Combining national-level leadership through, for example, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) with local-level engagement via LGUs, using a combined top-down and bottom-up ("bibingka") approach can be effective in accelerating progress:

To operationalize actions within these four policy opportunity domains, coordinated and multisectoral action is needed. The following provide concrete policy options:

Strengthen existing interagency alignment on climate change and nutrition

The NNC and CCC are the leading policy-making bodies of the government tasked to coordinate, monitor and evaluate government climatic and nutrition programs. They provide existing interagency platforms through which the alignment of climate change and nutrition efforts can be strengthened. Building on this, an interagency alignment group with clear terms

Key stakeholders for strengthening alignment

SECTOR/CATEGORY	SUB-AGENCIES / KEY MEMBERS
Climate Change Commission (CCC)	-
Department of Health (DOH)	National Nutrition Council (NNC) Health and Climate Change Office
Department of Science And Technology (DOST)	Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI)
Department of Agriculture (DA)	Climate Resilient Agriculture Office (DA-CRAO) Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI)
Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)	Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB)
Department of Education (DepEd)	Bureau of Learner Support Services - School Health Division
Department of Budget and Management (DBM)	-
Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement	SUN Movement Secretariat Philippines, SUN Civil Society Alliance Philippines, SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN), SUN Business Network, SUN Movement Secretariat (SMS), SUN Academe, SUN Youth, SUN Development Partners (UN agencies and donors)
Civil society	

of reference, strong mandate, and framework to ensure sustained existence could be formalized to operationalize national-to-local coordination, and support priority climate-nutrition actions.

Formalize collaboration through a joint memorandum circular

A joint memorandum circular would provide an avenue to formalize alignment, standardize procedures, define leadership responsibilities, and ensure policy coherence. A key area of focus could be aligning metrics, outputs, and result indicators across departments to guide resource allocation.

Align budgets and financing

One critical bottleneck for policy collaboration on climate and nutrition is the misalignment of budgets. Hence, before budget allocation happens, an assessment of potential opportunities for integration would be beneficial. The Philippines Program Convergence Budgeting also serves as an approach to align government resources to key opportunities for coordinated, holistic action across departments and agencies working towards the same goals.

Strengthen data sharing and monitoring systems

There are multiple relevant data collection efforts within the Philippines, such as the FNRI National Nutrition Surveys. However, the sharing of this data is limited or complicated through the use of different metrics and scales. Converging datasets across government agencies to support evidence-based planning and policy coherence. This can be done, for example, through developing shared Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) frameworks to track outputs, results, and accountability for resource use. An external accountability group can then be established to monitor translation of commitments into programs.

Engage local governments and communities

Climate, nutrition, health and food policies meet most closely at the community level: in the daily lives of people. Hence, local governments, communities, and civil society organizations are well-placed to implement climate-nutrition action. Key avenues for this include linking Local Government Units (LGUs) to academia and research, and integrating nutrition and climate objectives into Local Climate Change Action Plans. In line with the above, strategic communication and capacity development can help LGUs apply research and data to benefit local communities.

Call to action

The Philippines has the policy frameworks, institutional experience, and active stakeholder base needed to lead on integrating the climate and nutrition agendas. What is now required is urgent, coordinated action with clear leadership and political buy-in to deliver robust food system outcomes for climate and nutrition.

A high-level policy roundtable could serve as an initial catalyst to align government agencies, identify shared priorities, and define practical next steps. This should also involve local government units (LGUs), civil society, development partners, and the education sector, all of whom play vital roles in driving implementation on the ground. Platforms such as the National Nutrition Council (NNC), or the Climate Change Commission (CCC), have strong mandates to convene and sustain these multi-level, multi-sector efforts.

This roundtable should enable the identification of country-owned priorities and paths for coordinated action. The four domains provide specific opportunities for high-impact and effective action on both climate and nutrition:

- Promote consumption of diverse, fresh, and safe foods;
- Regulate the promotion of unhealthy foods;
- Phase out the sachet economy and reduce plastic pollution;
- Support climate-smart production and value chains for healthy foods.

Within these, priority actions should be selected through a country-led process with stakeholder input. A strong network of civil society and development partners stands ready to support government leadership. These priorities can guide integrated actions at the policy level through enablers such as convergence budgeting, data sharing, and aligned monitoring. Together, government, civil society, and development partners can chart a clear, coordinated pathway to climate-resilient and nutrition-secure food systems in the Philippines.

[i] Bibingka is a type of Filipino rice cake that is cooked by placing live charcoal simultaneously on top of and below the dough during the baking process (fire on top and below).

[ii] Germanwatch 2025. Climate Risk Index 2025. Who suffers most from extreme weather events? https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Climate%20Risk%20Index%202025.pdf

[iii] WB & ADB 2021. Climate risk country profile: Philippines. World Bank & Asian Development Bank. https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/15852-WB_Philippines%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf

[iv] Ibid.

[v] UNICEF Philippines. (2025, January 20). How communities in the Philippines are working to combat child malnutrition: Macalelon's commitment to nutrition for every child. https://www.unicef.org/philippines/stories/how-communities-philippines-are-working-combat-child-malnutrition

[vi] UNICEF Philippines. (2025, March 4). Stronger food policies needed to combat obesity in the Philippines. https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/stronger-food-policies-needed-combat-obesity-philippines

[vii] Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2028: Bringing resilience to Filipino communities, p.12.

[viii] UNICEF Philippines. (2025, March 4). Stronger food policies needed to combat obesity in the Philippines. https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/stronger-food-policies-needed-combat-obesity-philippines

[ix] Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023-2028, p.126.

[x] World Bank. 2021.Market study for the Philippines: plastics circularity opportunities and barriers. http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35295

[xi] Monato, K.C. 2025. The bitter truth: The Philippine sweetened beverage tax needs an upsize. Business World. https://www.bworldonline.com/opinion/2025/07/21/686281/the-bitter-truth-the-philippine-sweetened-beverage-tax-needs-an-upsize/

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About this policy brief

This policy brief builds on and summarizes the outcomes of a participatory, stakeholder-driven, and cross-sectoral workshop convened with representatives from the DOH, DA, the National Nutrition Council, development partners and civil society representatives, with inputs from the NNC and DENR. The session, held in Manila, the Philippines on 18 September 2025, was co-organized by Clim-Eat, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), SUN Movement Secretariat-Asia and SUN-Civil Society Network. This policy brief builds on the workshop deliberations to present key recommendations, actionable pathways, and priority intervention areas for integrating climate and nutrition objectives in Philippine food systems.

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Please contact Leanne Zeppenfeldt (leanne@clim-eat.org) for more information on this workstream.

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References/further reading

Options to address the climate-nutrition nexus in the Philippines
by Sonja Vermeulen

Game-changing actions in the food system for achieving both climate change and nutrition outcomes
by Bruce Campbell, Senni Alho and Leanne Zeppenfeldt