



Alliance



Food Systems e-course 2024

Governance and political economy of food system transformation

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Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) are CGIAR Research Centers. CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

What I want to talk about today...

Governance and political economy of food system *transformation*

What is the right (governance) model?

Some (provocative?) statements/questions

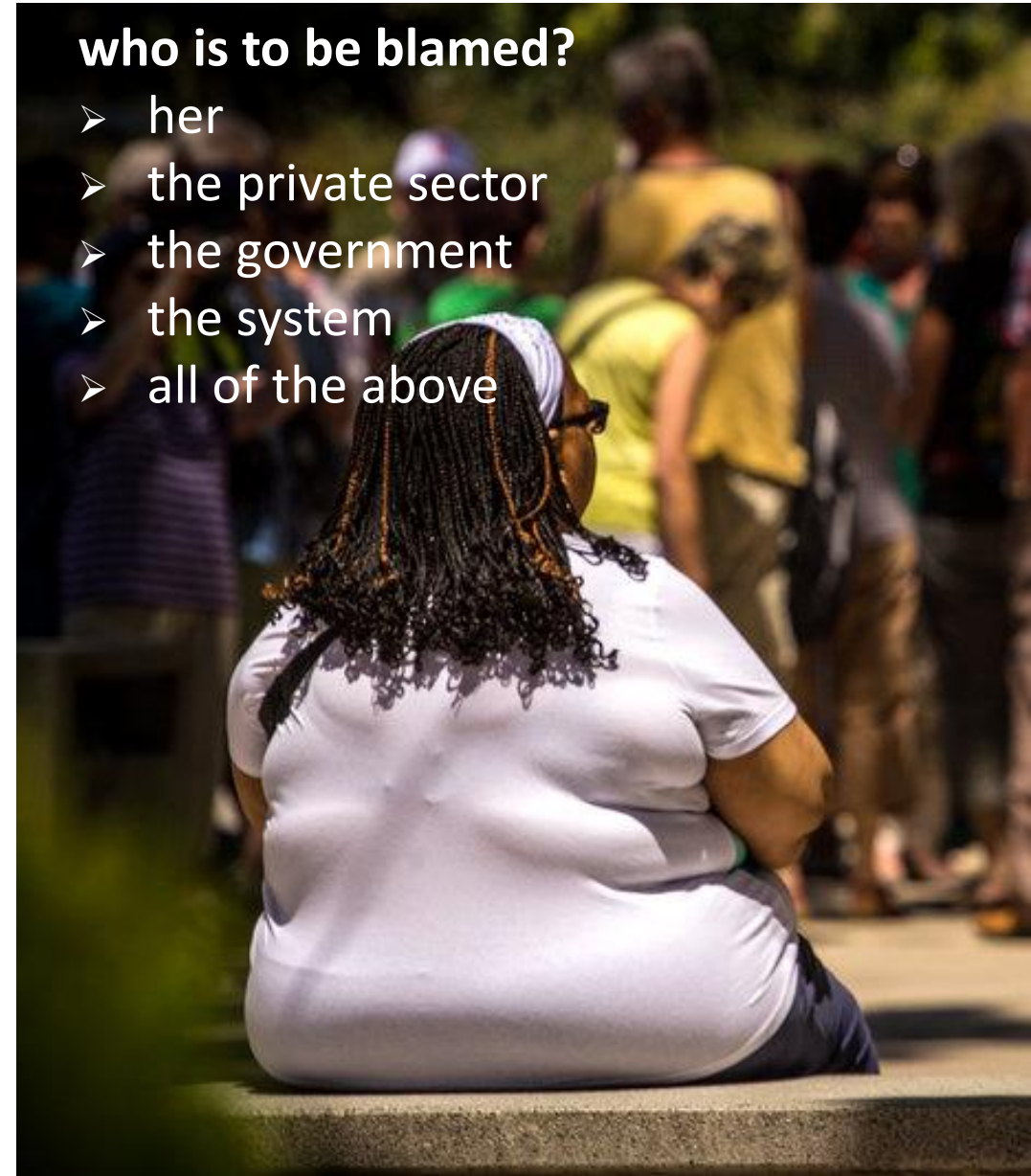
Food system transformation is not about technological innovation...

...it is about governance and “political economy”

“who controls the process”

who is to be blamed?

- her
- the private sector
- the government
- the system
- all of the above



Structure of the presentation

- The concept and transformation (and why it is relevant for governance)
- Governance of (food system) transformation
- Barriers to transformative changes (and why political economy is relevant)



Transformation – what does this term imply?



- Transformation = radical and structural change (as opposed to incremental changes)
- Food systems have always been transforming e.g. [Pingali 2004](#); [Burch and Lawrence 2005](#); [Reardon et al. 2003](#)
“Supermarketization of food systems”
- other examples:
 - Green revolution; shift to mono-cultures; ‘westernization’ of diets; use of GMOs; next = e-shopping? ...
 - ⇒ pace/speed, scale/magnitude, structure/functioning changes
 - ⇒ **but no necessarily leading to positive outcomes**

Transformation – what does this term imply?

- Transformation as a normative / prescriptive concept
 - deliberate/intended change, in a desirable (positive) direction => to build a “better” system
 - toward sustainability?

*“The literature and tone is generally optimistic and **normative**. It presents transformation as **inherently good** and largely defines what is legitimate and justifiable knowledge and practice for **transformations to sustainability**.”*

(Blythe et al. 2018, p.1216)

*“... we cannot wait decades to start the transition if we are to successfully turn the big ships of local and global agri-food systems from their current, perilous course **towards a coherent, just, well-integrated and sustainable food system**”*

(Barrett et al. 2020, p.1)



Transformation of food systems...

... from unintended ...



- structural changes
 - engine of change = technological innovation
 - market driven
 - random
- = > **not necessarily sustainable**
- leads to less healthy and less sustainable outcomes

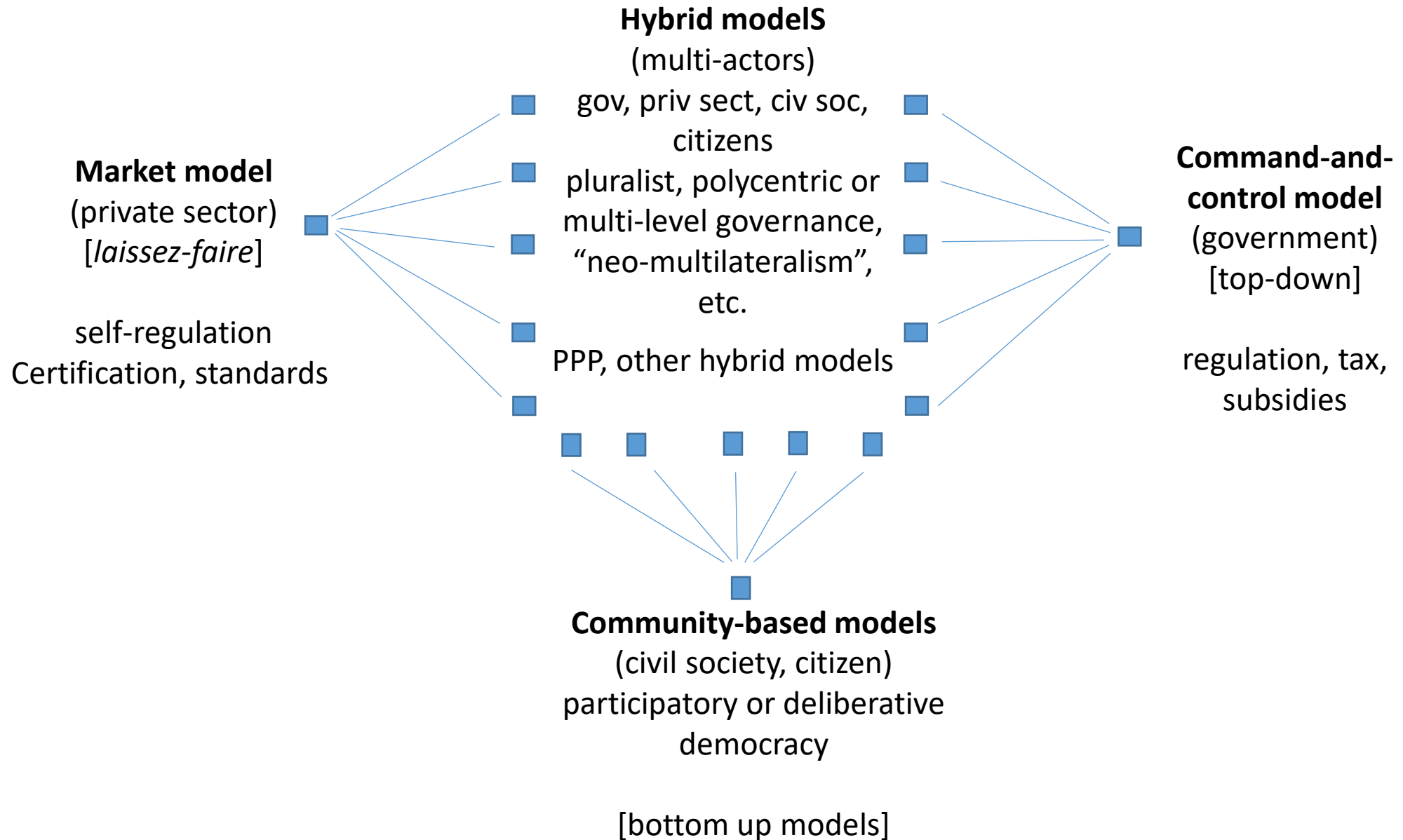
Transformation of food systems...

... from unintended... to deliberate



- structural changes
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What governance models for normative food system transformation?



Governance of transformative changes

Cross Cutting Reforms to Transform Food and Land Use



Government: Establish targets; break down governmental silos; put a price on carbon; land use planning; repurpose agricultural support and public procurement; massively increase R&D and target it on healthy, natural solutions.



Business & Farmers: Organise pre-competitively to support government reform agendas and set internal standards for specific sectors; establish true cost accounting for food and land use.



Investors & Financial Institutions: Build on the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures to cover nature; develop a set of financing principles for food and land use; develop innovative finance instruments, including blended finance, to manage risks and leverage opportunities.



Participants in multilateral processes and multi-stakeholder partnerships: Raise ambition in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2020 stock-take and ensure an ambitious outcome in the 2020 Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China.



Civil Society: Drive information campaigns for food and land use reform and direct campaigns against serial offenders (public and private).

Food and Land Use Coalition report (2019)

Governance *for* transformative changes

Acknowledging the political dimension

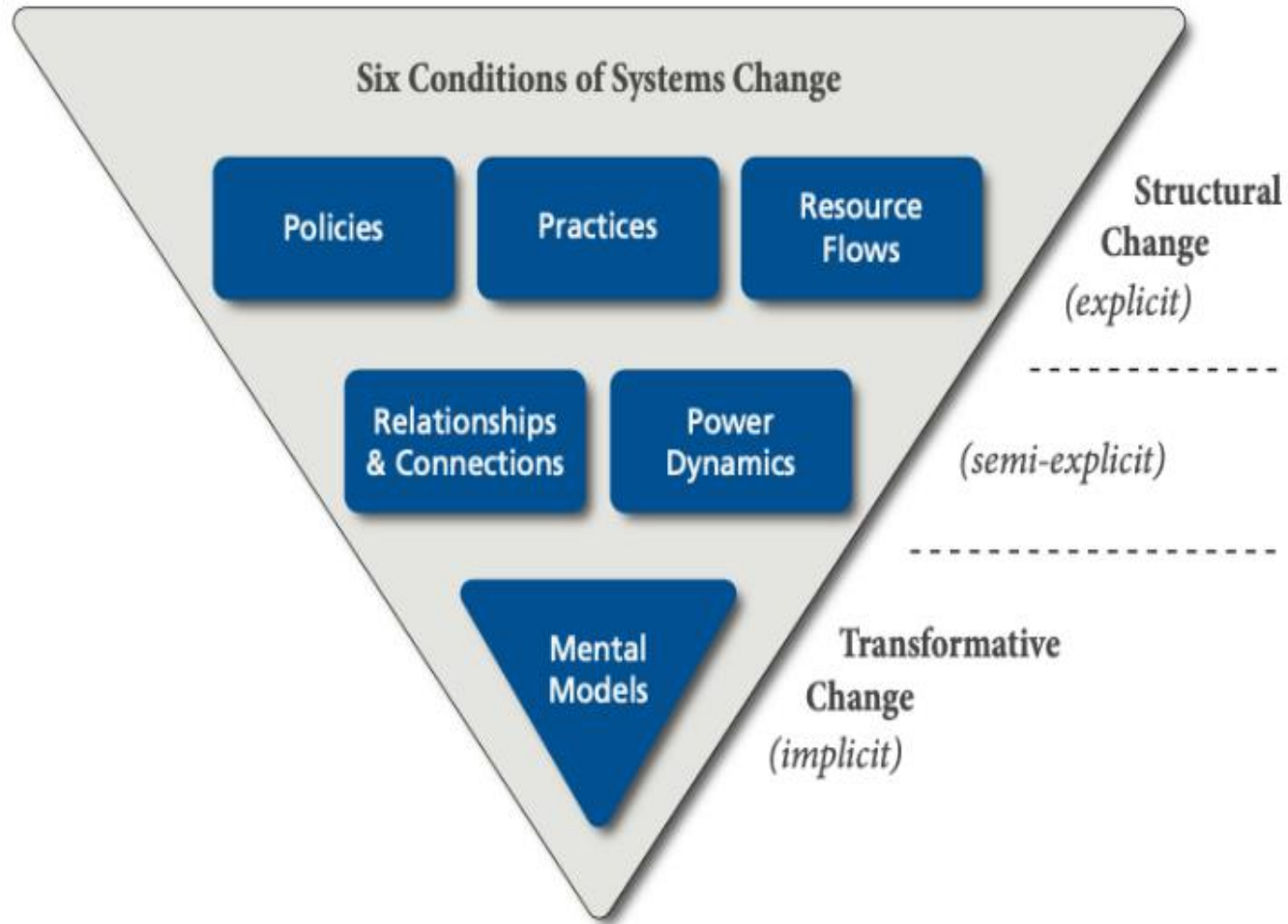
“The transformative changes being called for in a global food system in crisis cannot – and ultimately will not – be achieved without intense scrutiny of and changes in **the underlying political economies that drive today’s food systems**”

Baker et al., 2021, p.735

“System change is about **shifting the conditions that are holding a problem in place**” (credited to Kania et al., 2018)

➤ **Not just about *who* is involved but *what* is being challenged/changed**

Governance *for* transformative changes



Kania et al. 2018

See also
Meadows 1999
or Abson 2017

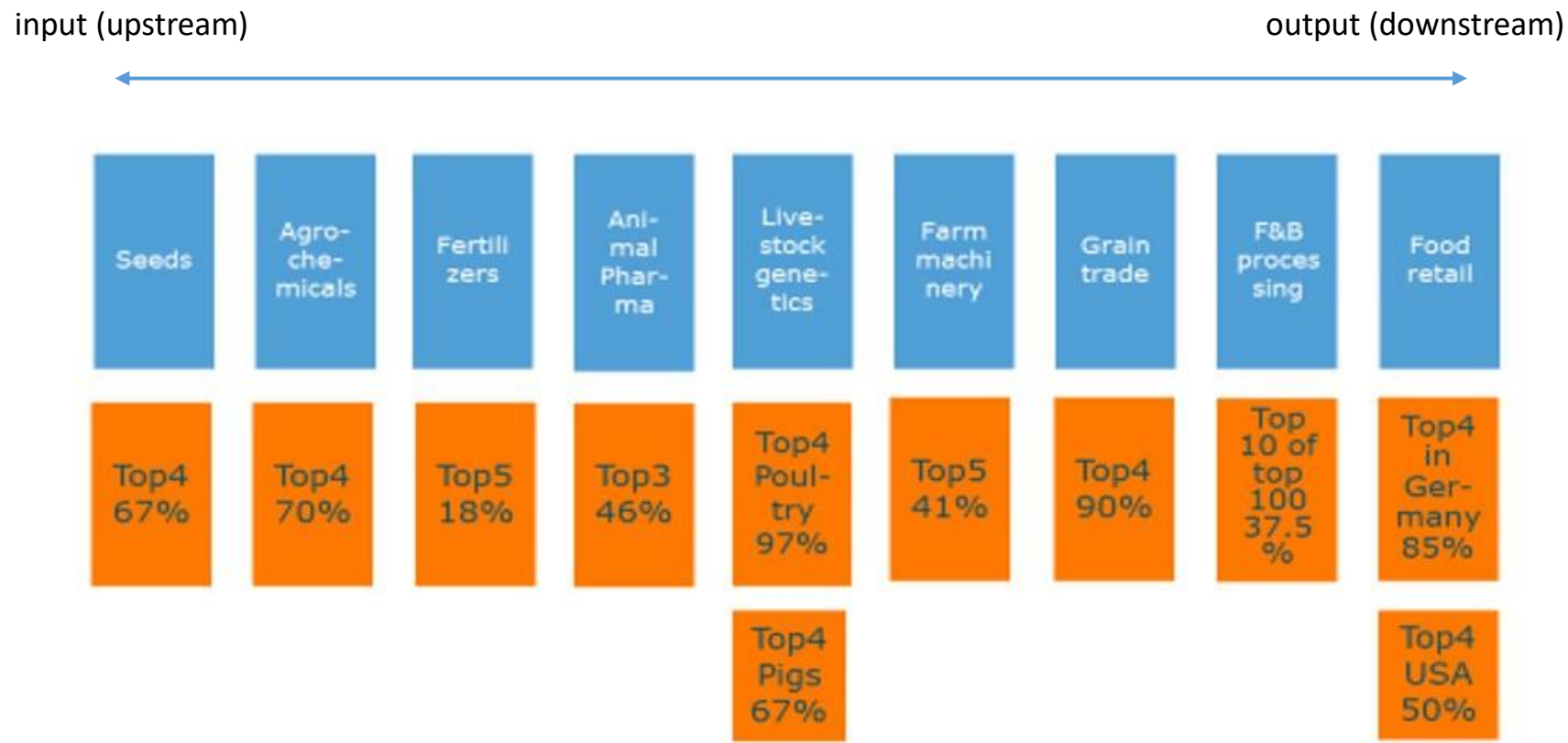
Barriers to the necessary transformative changes?

- Food systems controlled and locked by powerful actors (the Big Food) who have strong interests to maintain the current trajectory
- Irreconcilable divergences between other actors' objectives and values prevent the alignment of political wills



1. The Big Food (concentration of power, resources, knowledge)

- Agri-food industry one of the most concentrated sectors in the world economy



source: Data compiled by S. Berkum (WUR)

1. The Big Food (concentration of power, resources, knowledge)

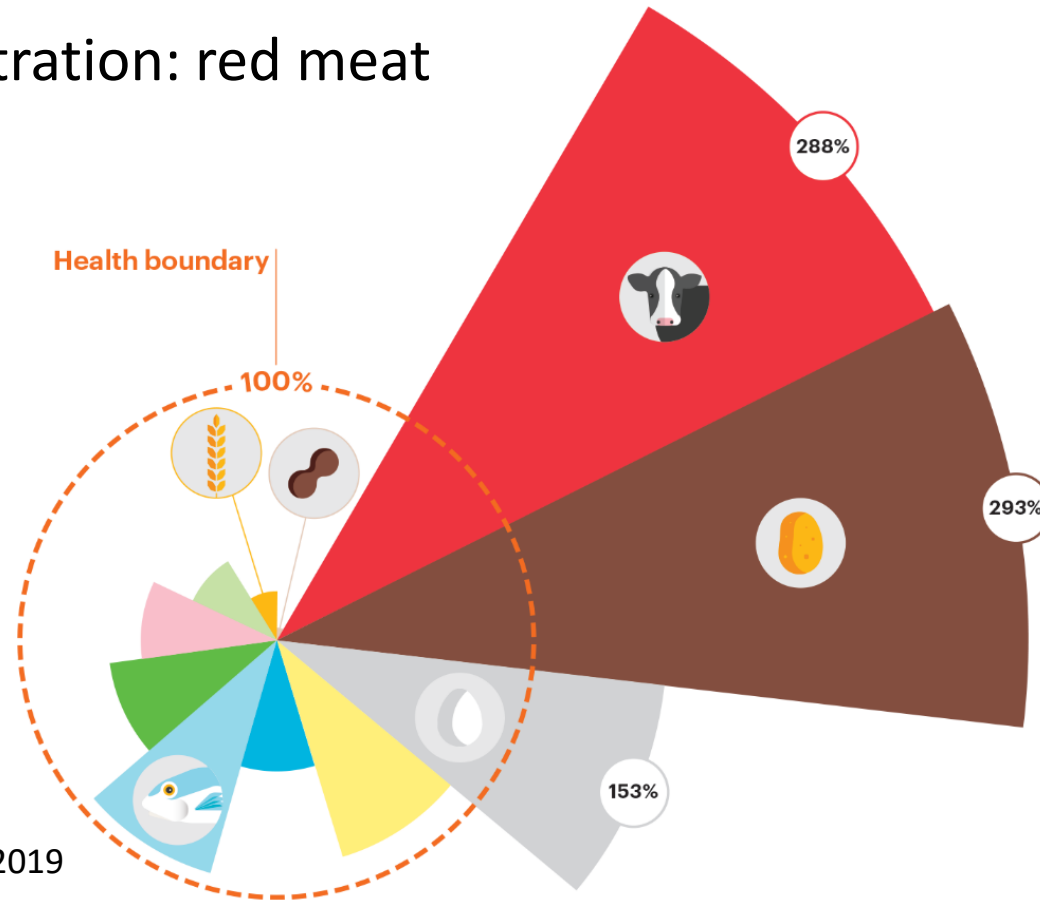


Implications

- Setting the terms of debate and shaping policies
 - “Power of influence” (lobbying)
 - Scale effect: when one firm’s decision becomes *de facto* regulation...

2. Irreconcilable trade-offs between various actors

- Divergences of objectives and values between various actors prevent the alignment of political wills
- Illustration: red meat



staying within the planetary boundaries requires a greater than 50% reduction in global* consumption red meat

* global = essentially in HICs

2. Irreconcilable trade-offs between various actors

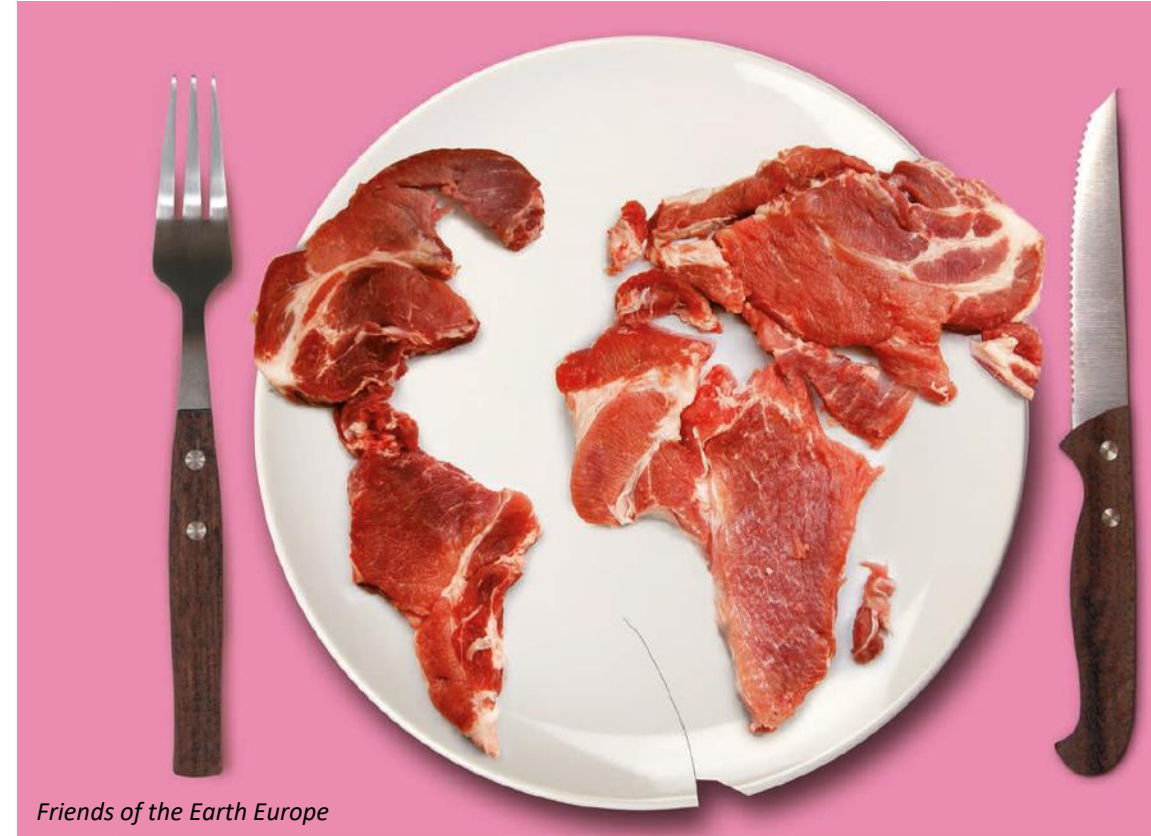
Red meat

- Consumption
 - Exceeds the reference diet intake by 300% to 600%
 - 3 billion people expected to increase their consumption of meat ([OECD/FAO 2018](#))
- Production
 - projected to expand by > 19Mt by 2029, reaching nearly 345Mt ([OECD/FAO 2018](#))
 - LMICs : 76% of the additional output (China, Brazil) + US



2. Irreconcilable trade-offs between various actors

- Governments' support/subsidies
 - US Tyson and Smithfield (beef industry): US\$572 million per year of subsidies between 1997 and 2005 ([Starmer and Wise 2007](#))
 - Chinese pork industry: US\$22 billion per year, ([the Economist 2014](#))
 - Brazilian Federal government shareholder of JBS (world's largest meat processor) ([Pigatto and Pigatto 2015](#))



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For discussion

- What changes would need to happen to:
 - harness the **Big Food's** innovative potentials and re-align its driver (profit) with sustainability?
 - make **governments** accountable for their (unsustainable) decisions/policy
 - help address the **consumers'** 'twisted problem'
 - culturally acceptable diet is not necessarily the same as sustainable or healthy diets

