

FOOD SYSTEM AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION POLICY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP



WORKSHOP REPORT

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List of Acronyms

AFRA – Association for Rural Advancement
AN – Adaptation Network
CCA – Climate Change Act
CCAMP – Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan
COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions
DFFE – Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
ECARP – Eastern Cape Adaptation Research Programme
GHG – Greenhouse Gas
IEJ – Institute for Economic Justice
LEDS – Low Emissions Development Strategy
MECs – Members of the Executive Committee
NASP – National Adaptation Strategy and Plan
NDCs – Nationally Determined Contributions
NEMA – National Environmental Management Act
PARI – Public Affairs Research Institute
PCC – Presidential Climate Commission
SCAT – Social Change Assistance Trust
SDFs – Spatial Development Frameworks
SETS – Sectoral Emissions Target
UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Introduction

This report captures the discussions and reflections from the Food System and Climate Adaptation Policy Engagement Workshop, held on 20 - 22 October 2025. The workshop aimed to build a shared foundation of knowledge across diverse constituencies in the food system, deepen understanding of the links between climate change and food systems, and consider how implementation of key aspects of the Climate Change Act (CCA) can be shaped through participatory and justice-based advocacy in relation to the food system. Grounding the discussion in both policy debates and South Africa's lived realities created space for collective strategising towards a just transition in the food system. A principal aim of the workshop was to strengthen participants' capacity to engage in relevant policy, especially in the development of the National and Sector Adaptation Plans that are mandated under the CCA. This is critical to ensure voices and needs from the grassroots and civil society inform the content of these plans. The workshop, therefore, also developed a plan of action focused on ongoing capacity building, coordination, and planned engagements with policymakers.

This report synthesises the workshop's discussions and key learnings. It lays out the political context, explores the links between climate and the food system, examines dominant approaches and emerging alternatives, unpacks varying perspectives on the just transition, reflects on the value of policy engagement and available tools, surfaces the key policies related to climate and food systems and how to engage with them, and concludes with a consolidated way forward.

Section 1: Climate Change and the Global Context

This workshop was convened at a critical moment for South Africa's food system and climate landscape, as climate change accelerates and international policy efforts intensify in response. To set the foundation for the discussions, the workshop began with an overview of the global climate policy landscape and an explanation of key concepts (presented by [Malik Dasoo](#)).

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns caused largely by the accumulation of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere, intensifying global warming and accelerating environmental change. Rising temperatures increase the frequency and severity of droughts, floods and heatwaves. In South Africa, a water-scarce country with climate-sensitive agriculture, these impacts reduce crop yields, strain livestock and fisheries, worsen food and water insecurity, heighten health risks and deepen economic vulnerability. Climate change also amplifies existing inequalities linked to land, poverty and access to resources.

To govern the global response to human-induced climate change, countries established the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The Convention sets out obligations to reduce emissions (mitigation), prepare for climate impacts (adaptation), address unavoidable losses (loss and damage) and mobilise

climate finance. Several major outcomes emerged under the UNFCCC, the most significant of which is the 2015 Paris Agreement. The Agreement commits all countries to limiting global warming to 1.5°C and to developing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which outline planned mitigation and adaptation actions. The UNFCCC benefits from near-universal participation, has established mechanisms for transparency and climate finance, and provides a shared scientific framework for global climate action. However, progress remains slow due to the voluntary nature of commitments, the absence of binding obligations to reduce emissions through NDCs, and the lack of enforcement mechanisms. Climate finance to the Global South is still insufficient for both mitigation and adaptation, and persistent geopolitical power imbalances continue to constrain meaningful progress. This has resulted in limited progress in climate action and even fewer resources being mobilised for implementation. Adaptation in particular, has received little attention at the international level. This places greater responsibility on national and local policy processes to withstand escalating climate impacts, underscoring the need for civil society to actively shape these policies in the absence of adequate global leadership.

Section 2: Climate Change and the South African Food System

Climate change is reshaping every part of South Africa's food system, from what is grown to how it is produced and who is able to access it, intensifying pressures on a system already marked by vulnerability and inequality. The workshop highlighted the specific ways in which climate and food systems are interlinked, showing how entrenched inequalities, skewed land ownership, concentrated agribusiness power, precarious labour, rising food prices and unequal access to nutritious food not only shape everyday experiences of hunger and exclusion but also heighten the system's exposure to climate shocks.

The food system, defined as the full set of activities and relationships involved in producing, transporting, processing, selling and consuming food, play a dual role in the climate crisis (explained by [Andrew Bennie's \(IEJ\) presentation](#)). On the one hand, the food system contributes significantly to emissions across the entire value chain, from energy-intensive production and long-distance transport to cold storage, processing, and food waste (as [presented by Stephen Greenberg](#)). On the other hand, the same system is acutely vulnerable to climate impacts. Droughts, heatwaves, flooding, shifting ocean temperatures and rising food prices threaten crops, livestock, fisheries, workers and households, deepening existing social and economic inequalities ([presented by Yasirah Madhi \(IEJ\)](#)). This combination of high emissions and high exposure makes transformation of the food system urgent.

In South Africa, meaningful climate adaptation cannot be separated from questions of land, tenure security and power ([presented by Stha Yeni](#)). Top-down mitigation or conservation strategies risk reinforcing or deepening inequalities when they require land without recognising who currently depends on it. By contrast, secure tenure and redistributive land reform create the conditions for smallholder farmers and farm dwellers, especially women, to invest, adapt and transition towards more resilient livelihoods.

To support constituencies in situating themselves within the broader climate–food system, participants reflected on how climate change is already affecting their livelihoods and access to food. Table 1 summarises the key impacts and structural challenges identified across constituencies.

Table 1: How constituencies experience climate change impacts across the food system

Constituency	Key climate-related impacts in the food system	Structural and social dimensions highlighted
Land	Climate impacts exacerbate displacement through conservation expansion, flooding in informal settlements and extreme heat affecting food production and storage.	Insecure communal and urban land tenure, weak consent processes and fragmented land governance undermine adaptation. Lack of integration between land, housing and food-system policy deepens cycles of poverty.
Farm workers and dwellers	Extreme heat, floods and drought affect the human body, reduce workable days and damage crops. Increased pests and pesticide use pose health risks. Water scarcity forces reliance on unsafe water sources.	Precarious and seasonal employment, poor working conditions and lack of basic services deepen vulnerability. Job losses and declining production contribute to rising poverty, gender-based violence and crime.
Climate justice	Droughts, water scarcity and declining yields affect both commercial and small-scale producers. Rising food prices reduce diet quality and nutrition.	Limited capacity at the local government level, weak coordination across spheres of government and inadequate community engagement place responsibility on CBOs. Care work and social reproduction burdens fall disproportionately on women.
Labour	Climate impacts and mitigation responses contribute to job losses, casualisation and labour-displacing technologies. Increased food prices and reduced household food security.	Loss of stable employment shifts adaptation costs onto households. Weak policy implementation and delayed land redistribution perpetuate inequality and precarious livelihoods.
Informal traders and waste pickers	Rising temperatures accelerate food spoilage, increasing waste, health risks and income loss. Climate variability complicates food handling and storage. Food waste in landfills increases emissions and exposes workers to harmful conditions. Poor waste	Insecure trading spaces and lack of tenure discourage investment in climate-resilient infrastructure. Urban governance systems often fail to recognise informal trade as a core component of food systems.

Constituency	Key climate-related impacts in the food system	Structural and social dimensions highlighted
	separation exacerbates health risks and environmental impacts.	Inadequate municipal waste management and landfill closures threaten livelihoods. Lack of recognition and alternative infrastructure (e.g. material recovery facilities) displaces workers from the food-waste system.
Farmers and fishers	Changing rainfall patterns, droughts, flooding and rising temperatures disrupt planting seasons, reduce yields and increase disease. Marine species migration, ocean acidification and deoxygenation reduce fish stocks, undermining both food access and livelihoods.	Restrictive conservation measures, outdated fishing regulations and local bylaws limit access to resources. Loss of livelihoods intensifies poverty, migration and care burdens within households.

Section 3: Mainstream Responses and Emerging Alternatives

The previous session dealt with the relationship between climate change and South Africa’s food system, and how it impacts particular sectors - farmers, the land sector, informal traders, waste pickers, workers, and women. This session, therefore, turned to identifying and examining required responses, or alternatives, to ensure adaptation and resilience of these sectors and what should inform our policy proposals.

South Africa’s existing responses to climate change in agriculture and food systems remain heavily shaped by conventional, top-down approaches that mirror the broader inequalities of the food system itself. The Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan (CCAMP) for agriculture, drafted almost a decade ago and still a central sectoral reference point, encapsulates the state’s approach to climate action ([Presented by Andrew Bennie and Stephen Greenberg](#)). While it recognises climatic risks and promotes climate-smart agriculture, efficiency measures and localised adaptation planning, it ultimately reinforces a corporate-led model of agriculture. Its narrow focus on primary production overlooks the wider food system, including labour, processing, retail, informal markets, consumption and food prices. Smallholder farmers are positioned as marginal and “non-viable,” with consolidation and increased scale implicitly framed as the preferred development pathway. Social justice, gender equity and labour rights are virtually absent, and proposals such as expanding irrigation sit uneasily alongside South Africa’s profound water scarcity.

Workshop discussions revealed a growing body of alternative thinking that understands climate action not only as a technical challenge but as a question of power, justice and social

transformation. Across constituencies, women smallholders, farm workers, informal traders, rural communities, youth and agroecology organisers, participants described climate change as inseparable from everyday struggles over land, wages, food access, and decision-making. Their proposals formed an integrated vision rather than isolated demands. Strengthening women's land rights, securing tenure for farm dwellers, improving worker protections, supporting informal traders, and revitalising indigenous seed systems were presented as mutually reinforcing pillars of a climate-resilient food system (emerging from presentations by [Ndivile Mokoena](#) (GenderCC) and [Asanda Sandi](#) (ECARP)).

Agroecology emerged as the connective thread linking these demands (emerging from the presentation by Laurel Oettle (AFRA)). It is a democratic and sustainable alternative for food production rooted in labour dignity, gender justice, community agency and localised economies. Participants noted that the shift to agroecology requires redistributive land reform, the subdivision of agricultural land where appropriate, public investment in local markets and seed systems, and participatory governance structures that give farmers, workers and communities real decision-making power. This aligns with labour's insistence on climate-proofed workplaces, heat-risk protections and improved wages; with women farmers' calls for autonomy over land, water and seeds; and with informal traders' need for secure trading spaces, infrastructure and inclusion in food system planning. Taken together, these reflect a shared belief that the transition must transform, not just adapt, the foundations of the food system.

Community-based perspectives further reinforced this integrated approach. Informal traders, waste pickers, small-scale fishers and rural households described climate impacts cascading through interconnected systems: heat stress affecting workers, crop failures driving up food prices, market concentration squeezing consumers, and weak infrastructure compounding household vulnerability. Their solutions likewise worked across systems: decentralised food buffer stocks, community grain reserves, circular-waste systems, water harvesting, local processing hubs, and solidarity-based trading networks. These proposals complement agroecological production, gender-responsive land reform and labour protections, illustrating how resilience is built through diversified livelihoods, strong local institutions and shared control over resources.

What emerged from these exchanges is a coherent alternative paradigm to the dominant policy approach. While frameworks like CCAMP focus on technical fixes and efficiencies within the existing agricultural model, constituency-driven perspectives emphasise democratising the food system, redistributing land and power, valuing indigenous knowledge, securing decent work, and building climate resilience through agroecological and community-led systems. Rather than presenting separate agendas, these perspectives form an interconnected strategy for transformation, one that links production, labour, trade, consumption and governance in a single vision of justice.

The challenge and opportunity moving forward is to ensure that instruments such as the CCA, sector adaptation planning processes, municipal climate forums and interdepartmental coordination spaces enable these integrated alternatives to shape South Africa's climate

response. Doing so would move the national agenda beyond stabilising the current food system and toward building one that is equitable, climate-resilient and aligned with the priorities of those most affected by climate and economic pressures.

Section 4: What a Just Transition Means in the Food System

After discussing climate impacts in the food system on sectors and people's alternatives to build resilience under climate change, the workshop turned to linking these priorities to a just transition in the food system. It became clear that a just transition in the food system is not a single, fixed idea. Different actors define it in ways shaped by their experiences, mandates and vulnerabilities within the food system. Across the workshop, participants described distinct yet overlapping visions, each offering a different entry point for transforming how South Africa responds to climate impacts.

Many constituencies have already developed their own frameworks to guide this process. Government's approach, reflected in the Presidential Climate Commission's (PCC) Just Transition Framework, the CCA, national vulnerability assessments and emerging sectoral adaptation plans, focuses on strengthening resilience within key sectors like agriculture, expanding extension services, modelling climate risks, and supporting subsistence farmers through practical tools (emerging from input by Tlou Ramaru (DFFE)). Labour movements, including COSATU, have articulated their own just transition blueprints across mining, energy, transport and agriculture, emphasising decent work, social protection, reskilling and worker-led solutions for building a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy (emerging from input by Boitumelo Molete (COSATU)).

As the workshop unfolded, it became clear that the idea of a just transition is still predominantly framed through an energy lens, with limited attention to agriculture and even less to the broader food system with its intertwined labour, market, land and consumption dynamics. This imbalance surfaced repeatedly: while government frameworks provide important institutional footholds, they rarely engage with food systems as integrated social, ecological and economic systems.

Community and small-scale producer perspectives explicitly filled this gap by situating the just transition across the entire food system (emerging from input by Makoma Lekalakala (Earthlife Africa and PCC and group discussion). Their visions centred on democratic control of land and resources, farmer-led agroecological production, seed sovereignty, local markets, circular waste practices, and community-managed infrastructure. For them, justice is tied to agency: who decides, who benefits, and how transitions strengthen, not displace, existing livelihoods and knowledge systems. These orientations recognise food not only as an economic sector but as a terrain of culture, care, identity and survival.

Labour and informal economy perspectives added the dimension of livelihoods and decent work, emphasising safe working conditions under rising heat, living wages, protections for seasonal and informal workers, and the need for transition pathways that do not deepen

precarity. They highlighted the importance of integrating food-system labour, farmworkers, traders, fishers, and waste pickers into adaptation and transition planning that typically focuses only on producers or commercial actors.

Youth perspectives introduced a distinct intergenerational lens (emerging from input by Moliehi Mafantiri (IEJ)). They saw the Just Transition not only as a matter of current adaptation but as a commitment to future well-being, requiring investment in skills, education, and opportunities for young people to shape long-term food economies. Their concerns about being sidelined in transition planning echoed community calls for accessible information, participatory governance and climate education rooted in lived reality rather than technical narratives.

Constituencies envision a process that redistributes power, strengthens local agency, protects livelihoods, values indigenous knowledge, and addresses inequalities embedded across the food system. Government frameworks offer an important starting point, but the workshop made clear that a just transition becomes meaningful only when shaped collaboratively, through the combined visions, experiences and priorities of those who produce, trade, harvest, work within and rely on South Africa's food system.

Section 5: The Climate Change Act

With the above basis in mind, the workshop turned to understanding the key policy provisions of the Climate Change Act (CCA) and the opportunities they provide for policy participation by the sectors present at the workshop. A key part of this is the development of the National and Sector Adaptation Plans, in which we need to intervene. South Africa's climate response is informed by the UNFCCC mandates on mitigation and adaptation. Signatories are required to develop and implement Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), a Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS), a National Adaptation Strategy and Plan (NASP), and to produce Biennial Transparency Reports.

[The Climate Change Act 22](#) (CCA) is categorised as a Specific Environment Management Act and is guided by the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) and its principles, including the principle of a just transition. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) serves as the lead coordinating department of the legislation. In addition, other departments are responsible for developing and implementing sector-specific plans and actions under the Act. Climate action is therefore inherently cross-sectoral, making it essential for civil society to engage across all relevant departments (presented by Louise Naude and [Tlou Ramaru](#)). Table 2 provides an overview of the Act based on its main sections.

Table 2: Overview of the content of the Act

Chapter	Content
1	Objectives and application of the Act
2	Policy alignment and institutional arrangements, including the need for provincial and municipal forums on climate change, and the statutory establishment of the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)
3	Provincial and municipal climate change response and financing mechanism
4	Adaptation objectives and scenarios, the National Adaptation Strategy and Plan (NASP), and sector plans
5	Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals, including sector emissions targets (SETs), carbon budgets, and the phase-down and phase-out of synthetic GHG emissions
6	Regulations, public participation, access to information, and offences and penalties
Schedule 1	Sectors which must develop SETs
Schedule 2	Sectors which must develop adaptation plans

The primary objectives of the Act are to coordinate an effective climate change response across society and to collectively move to a just, low-carbon economy. Emphasis is placed on protecting and building resilience and adaptive capacity in vulnerable communities. The Act provides a broad guideline for the country’s climate response, and specifics will be defined through future regulations, national, provincial and municipal plans, sectoral guidelines, and Ministerial decisions. **It is the development of these plans that provides civil society (including labour) and the public with an important opportunity to shape South Africa’s climate response for the food system.**

The opening sections of the Act on *policy alignment* require that all plans and policies must integrate climate, considering the impact of any development or plan on climate change, and considering the impact of climate change on any development or plan. This presents civil society with an opportunity to advocate for integration across departments and plans, and to use climate change response as a framing for agri-food system transformation and just transition.

The Act establishes the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) as a legal body which is tasked with making recommendations to the President on climate actions. Commissioners are nominated, and there are representatives from civil society and labour. The PCC has working groups on mitigation and employment strategy, adaptation and resilience, finance and innovation, and monitoring and evaluation and learning. It also consists of a youth caucus and PCC Watch for civil society information sharing.

There are many opportunities for participation and engagement. Civil society should not wait before using these entry points to strengthen the PCC's food system agenda, calling for the inclusion of food price regulation, decent work for farm labourers, and support for informal and local food economies.

National Adaptation Plans

The Act mandates the development of the National Adaptation Strategy Plan (NASP). The Act requires government to develop national adaptation objectives and indicators to inform the NASP. These must be incorporated into all national planning instruments, policies and programmes that address, or are affected by, climate change impacts. In addition, the Act mandates the development of adaptation scenarios. These scenarios will include climate impact modelling in priority sectors, as well as consideration of early warning systems and adaptation response options. This can be quite a technical process, but civil society could see whether there is space to engage on the scenarios to put our issues on the table early on. Together, the objectives, indicators and scenarios will inform future policy development and the formulation of a NASP. The existing [NASP from 2019](#) (called the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy) will be revised and incorporated into the new NASP development

The NASP provides a common vision of climate change adaptation and climate resilience for the country, and outlines priority areas for achieving this vision. It provides guidance and a common reference point for everyone. The NASP doesn't go into the details on sector adaptation plans, but provides an overall framing. Key objectives are climate resilience and adaptive capacity, integration of climate adaptation response into planning and implementation, and ensuring resources and systems are in place to enable effective implementation.

We must advocate to ensure that our solutions, such as agroecology, food price regulation and stabilisation, gender just interventions, local human-centred food systems, and formal and informal worker needs are included in the objectives and the content of the NASP. This requires re-imagining adaptation not just as a technical adjustment, but as an opportunity to build socially just, decentralised, and ecologically-friendly food systems.

Sector Adaptation Plans

Following the completion of the NASP, specific sectors (such as agriculture) must develop their own adaptation plans. Schedule 2 of the CCA lists the sectors requiring a plan, with many sectors relevant to food systems, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, disaster risk reduction, energy, environment, health, water, rural development, land reform, human settlements, tourism, traditional affairs, transport and others.

Sector adaptation plans are expected to align with the objectives, indicators and scenarios set out in the NASP, while responding to sector-specific vulnerabilities, risks and institutional mandates. These processes offer opportunities to ensure that food systems are included in the

development of the scenarios and objectives for the NASP. They also provide opportunities to ensure that the differentiated impacts of climate change on poor communities, workers, women, youth and smallholder farmers are included in the scenarios and reflected in sectoral priorities and responses.

Workshop discussions identified agriculture as a central focus for engagement, given its direct role in food production, livelihoods and emissions, as well as the existence of an existing sector adaptation plan for agriculture. However, participants emphasised that a food-systems approach to adaptation cannot be addressed through agriculture alone. Decisions taken in other sectors, particularly water, land reform, rural development, human settlements, health and disaster risk reduction, were recognised as critical in shaping food access, labour conditions, prices, storage, transport and resilience across the food system. However, given limited capacity, the group agreed to prioritise **agriculture, water and land** as the three key areas to take forward for policy engagement.

Emissions Reduction Strategy

The Act requires the development of a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and a Low Emissions Development Strategy for South Africa. Country **emissions targets** over the next 5, 10 and 25 years are required in these processes. The latest NDC is currently awaiting Cabinet approval. Mitigation and adaptation often go together, and the NDC includes adaptation goals relating to water, disaster risk management, healthcare, nutritious food access and affordability, climate resilient settlements and infrastructure, and ecosystem-based adaptation, amongst others. Within the NDC, priority sectors (listed in Schedule 1 of the Act) are required to develop sector emissions targets (SETs), including agriculture, land, environment and water.

Local Action Plans

Action on climate change will be strongly shaped by local context. This means that local-level planning and implementation are key. The CCA requires that all **provinces, districts and metros** develop climate change needs and response assessments (every 5 years) and implementation plans based on the assessments. Local municipalities, aside from districts and metros, are not required to do these assessments or plans. The assessment must consider the impacts of climate change on all municipal functions, response options, particular and unique needs and risks, and vulnerabilities. There are opportunities to ensure that provinces and municipalities incorporate considerations for sustainable local food systems, land and related issues in their climate needs assessments and response plans, and that the voices and needs of local food system actors are heard.

Intergovernmental forums for multi-departmental coordination are critical for effective planning and implementation. Climate change is an “apex priority” (on top of all other priorities). The CCA requires the formation of provincial and municipal forums on climate change. Provincial Premier’s Intergovernmental Forums, which include Members of the Executive Committee (MECs) and report to the Presidency, are designated as the provincial coordinating body on

climate. The provincial forums provide a platform for food systems to be included in coordination, which is important as provinces have mandates across different areas of the food system, such as agriculture, economic development, and environment. Civil society should check which structures are being used at provincial and district levels, and identify opportunities for consistent engagement.

Climate issues from the assessments and response plans must be integrated into IDPs, and should also influence the provincial and municipal Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs) and municipal land use schemes (emerging from presentation by [Daniel Sher \(PARI\)](#)). When engaging with local government, we cannot ignore serious obstacles, including a lack of capacity and political will, that lead to a lack of effective implementation. The struggle for effective action on climate cannot be divorced from the renewal of local democracy. Civil society participation is most effective if organisations and networks are coordinated and organised and can speak with one voice. However, we must take the time to build the capacity of communities to effectively take up the available opportunities.

Individual organisations and networks should proceed with engagement wherever they have capacity. But we can also potentially consider selecting specific localities or districts for joint work, starting with checking with the DFFE, which the 10 priority districts are to see where we have network capacity to engage effectively in those places.

Indicative timelines

The Department provided indicative timelines outlining when key adaptation-related processes under the CCA are expected to unfold. These timelines are provisional and may shift as processes progress, depending on capacity, resourcing and coordination across departments. Sequencing may therefore not be linear, and some processes may overlap or extend over longer periods.

- Adaptation scenarios: 2025 – March 2026 - Development and refinement of national adaptation scenarios to inform future policy direction.
- Technical guidelines: 2025 – 2026 - Preparation of guidance to support departments and institutions in implementing adaptation requirements under the Act.
- Further development of adaptation scenarios: 2026 – 2027 - Ongoing updating or expansion of scenarios as additional data, modelling and sector inputs become available.
- Impact modelling for selected priority sectors (including agriculture and water): during 2026 - Sector-specific modelling to assess climate risks, impacts and potential response options.

Translation of the CCA into measurable impacts on the ground: medium to long term (approximately 5–10 years) - Gradual implementation of policies and plans, with tangible outcomes emerging over time.

Section 6: Value of policy engagement and tools

A key objective of the workshop was to understand key policy provisions under the CCA, like the adaptation plans, and to prepare for policy engagement. This session, therefore, aimed to create space for participants to reflect on whether, when and how policy processes are a useful arena for advancing the interests of their constituencies, particularly in contexts marked by power imbalances and uneven influence.

This session began with why we should or should not focus on policy in the first place. Malik Dasoo from the African Climate Foundation provided an overview of the relevance of policy engagement. Dasoo argued that it is necessary to engage because policy sets the rules and defines the priorities. Depending on how a process is structured, there could be an opportunity to shape the agenda and shift power dynamics. But it is not enough on its own. Sometimes there can be strong power imbalances that are not acknowledged, and where powerful entrenched interests (e.g. corporate lobbies) can limit the possibilities of change. Public consultation can end up being a tick-box exercise or being co-opted.

Louise Naude, from WWF and a PCC commissioner, shared information on tools for policy engagement. Policy spaces are sites of struggle, but there are also other spaces of struggle. Not everyone has to engage directly in policy processes, but can also work collectively with organisations operating in those spaces to bring forward priorities and proposals. This requires an effective, transparent and accountable movement. When entering into a policy process, we must consider what the key messages we want to bring are and how we will get our voices heard. Who we engage with will depend on the specific process.

It is important to build relationships. Nobody likes to be told that what they are doing is bad or useless. It is important to engage with policymakers by telling them what they have done right and where there is common ground before raising areas of disagreement. We can be firm in our stance while also recognising that other people may come from different angles. We can position ourselves to assist officials in meeting their targets and deadlines where these align with our interests.

A rich collective discussion followed. Participants agreed that, despite challenges experienced with policy making, it is important to engage with policy, especially to bring alternative viewpoints in and to give marginalised constituencies a space to voice their own concerns and solutions. Requirements for successful interventions include: focusing on priority processes and not trying to cover too much; having clear objectives and timeframes for interventions; making processes and content understandable to communities; prior preparation with communities for engagement to enable them to speak for themselves; recognition of power dynamics and thinking of ways to balance power relations; build alliances with other stakeholders; policy engagement as one approach alongside other actions; and persistent engagement. Unity and effective coordination are advantages.

Venues for public consultations need to be more accessible so people can participate. Information on content and process should be freely available in a central repository so people can access it when they need it. Submissions should be monitored to see if they have been included or not, and feedback provided to constituencies. Youth should be trained on how to understand policy and write policy briefs. Communities should be involved in the early stages of design and planning, and not just asked for input at later stages.

Entry points for engagement

Given this wider discussion, participants then broke into constituency groups to identify possible policy entry points for engagement. Constituencies indicated their priority interests. Specific plans and proposed activities are included in the action plan further below (Table 3).

Table 3: Constituencies entry points for engagement

Constituency	Areas of interest
Land	This constituency emphasised the need to feed inputs into the NASP, the SETs and relevant sector plans, particularly those dealing with land reform (including urban land), rural development and agriculture. They also stressed the importance of continuing district-level contributions where work is already underway.
Farm workers and dwellers	Farm workers and dwellers expressed interest in participating in all relevant processes. Their priority sectors include agriculture, land and rural development, and water. They also highlighted the importance of working collaboratively with farmers and fishers.
Climate justice	Climate justice organisations intend to participate across all processes, with a strong focus on capacity building and making substantive submissions.
Labour	Labour constituencies noted that they first need to undergo internal consultations to develop a mandate. Their areas of focus include agriculture, health, land, energy, transport and other related sectors.
Informal traders and waste pickers	For informal traders and waste pickers, the priority lies in engaging with sector adaptation plans, particularly those for agriculture, environment, land reform, human settlements and municipalities.
Farmers and fishers	Farmers and fishers aim to participate actively in policy processes, especially in shaping sector plans, and emphasise the importance of engaging with municipalities.

General needs identified

Participants identified several cross-cutting needs that must be addressed for communities and civil-society organisations to engage meaningfully with climate and food-system policy processes.

- Simplified language and processes: Policy content and consultation processes need to be communicated in clear, accessible language. Technical framing and complex procedures often limit meaningful participation.
- Capacity building before consultations: Capacity building should take place before formal consultations, including preparatory discussions within communities to clarify issues and priorities and enable confident participation.
- Human and financial resources for meetings/dialogues/reportback sessions, research as needed: Meaningful participation requires resources for organising meetings, facilitation, translation, research and report-back processes. Without resourcing, engagement relies on unpaid and unsustainable labour.
- Information on measures to hold municipalities to account: Communities need accessible information on how to hold municipalities accountable, including how to engage with IDPs, climate forums and budgeting processes.
- Build strong civic movements: Building strong local civic organisations is essential where plans are implemented, to support sustained engagement, monitoring and accountability over time.

Action plan and way forward

Sectors discussed several priorities for their sectors in moving forward, but the final session of the workshop focused on identifying what the key common points of action are, and that we will collectively coordinate and implement as the overall way forward of the workshop. This section captures these and outlines proposed follow-up actions, including development of a shared policy position paper, continued capacity building, a policy roundtable, and future collaboration.

Actions	Process/activities/outputs	Who	When
General next steps and ongoing tasks			
Report back to constituencies/ further prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise and share the workshop report and plan with participants Identify constituency lead/s to take the work forward Take documents back to members, report back to constituencies Labour position paper on the food system and CC for internal discussion and mandate Organise amongst own constituencies, e.g. WA groups Convene local workshops with constituencies and in wider communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage LandNNEs for a sector strategy Bringing people to consultation meetings 	Stephen/Yasirah Convening group with constituency reps Constituency leads Naledi, COSATU, IEJ Constituency leads All according to ability and capacity AFRA, PARI, Lamosa, IRD All to collaborate on resourcing to bring people together	End of November (workshop report) Other activities to End Feb 2026 Jan 2026
Comms and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form communications team Identify demand for the IEJ fact sheet, print and distribute as needed 	IEJ, SCAT, AFRA, SPP Adaptation Network IEJ	Meet Nov 2025 Ongoing to work on materials

Actions	Process/activities/outputs	Who	When
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the Act, what is the sector adaptation plan, and how to get involved in it • Summary of fact sheet, simplify workshop report • Translation of all materials (fact sheet, workshop report - isiZulu, Sepedi, Afrikaans, isiXhosa... find out if these are the final set of languages) • Graphics • Package and share submissions and other documents as processes unfold • Consolidate relevant documents and information in an online folder and share the link in the network from time to time 	<p>IEJ?, SCAT</p> <p>SPP</p> <p>AFRA, SPP, One Voice</p> <p>IEJ, AN Comms team</p>	
Information flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate the climate WA group under JT in the food system umbrella to share info, collective planning, and guidelines for civil society • Track processes, ensure people are informed, government docs and dates of consultations are circulated 	<p>Simpfiwe add, convening group (IEJ, GenderCC, AFRA, Biowatch, AN, Stephen) to maintain</p> <p>IEJ/convening group</p>	<p>Nov 2025</p> <p>ongoing</p>
Resource mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with SANBI and DBSA to find out more about opportunities for funds to grassroots and civil society, and share info in the network 	<p>Convening group</p>	
Consolidate engagements with key institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up DFFE, DoA to strengthen connections and identify areas for engagement • Investigate PCC activities and consider the possibility of more systematic engagement on food system-related priorities • Report back to the network 	<p>Convening group</p>	
Drafting of priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drafting team draw from consultations, this workshop, 	<p>IEJ</p>	<p>By the end of</p>

Actions	Process/activities/outputs	Who	When
position document	COSATU Blueprint to develop a summary of common priorities as the basis for further submissions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate for review • Hold an online meeting for feedback 		February
Policy roundtable - bring all Departments into one room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key departments and officials • Develop concept, programme, invitation, participant list • Identify 2-4 constituency reps with continuity, mandate (inputs and reportbacks), people who can engage at the policy level and can communicate effectively with constituencies and policy makers • Logistics • Facilitate roundtable 	IEJ, AFRA, LandNNEs, GenderCC, Biowatch, Adaptation Network, CIPSET (facilitation team) Constituency groups Facilitation team Facilitation team	Dec 2025-Jan 2026 Jan-Feb 2026 Once constituency teams are established (Dec/Jan) from Jan 2026 Mar/Apr 2026 tbc
Adaptation scenarios and national and sector plans [priority sectors: agriculture, land, rural development, water, human settlements]			
NASP and priority sector plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up DFFE and departments to establish timelines for development of adaptation scenarios, NASP and sector plans • Identify key processes for engagement • Develop content for NASP and sector plans, and submissions • Comms and media on positions 	Convening team, all Constituency groups Comms team	Priority processes to be identified and developed
Sector emissions targets and plans			
NDC and SETs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up DFFE and departments to establish timelines for development of SETs 	Convening team, all	Priority processes to be identified and

Actions	Process/activities/outputs	Who	When
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key processes for engagement Develop content for SETs (including possible further detailed research on emissions in the food system and possible areas for reductions), and submissions Comms and media on positions 	All interested parties/ constituencies IEJ on research? Comms team	developed
Provincial, district and metro assessments and response plans			
Provincial, district and metro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations to continue with existing engagements Follow up DFFE on 10 priority districts Consider which provinces and districts, if any, to focus shared activity [suggestions include Sekhukune (Limpopo), uMgungundlovu (KZN), Buffalo City (E Cape), Cape Winelands (W Cape)] If considered feasible in one or more, develop a proposal for a joint activity on CC at the district level and circulate for discussion [consider capacity building, early warning systems, content of IDPs, community mapping, dialogues, specific policy processes] Gather information about provincial and local governance mechanisms, timelines, opportunities for participation and share 	All Convening team Convening team to lead discussion Possible leads - Sekhukhune - CJC, Earthlife, Nkuzi uMgungundlovu - AFRA, Qina Mbokodo, Sweetside Organics Buffalo City - Afesis Corplan Cape Winelands – WFP, SAFE	

*Constituency leads:

Land – AFRA (Laurel); farm workers and dwellers – SAFE/WFP (Thando, Heleen, Magdalein), climate justice – SCAT/GenderCC tbc (Claire T, Ndivile); labour – Naledi/COSATU (Sizwe/Kedibone/Howard); informal traders and waste pickers – tbc/WIEGO (tbc/Paul); farmers and fishers - tbc