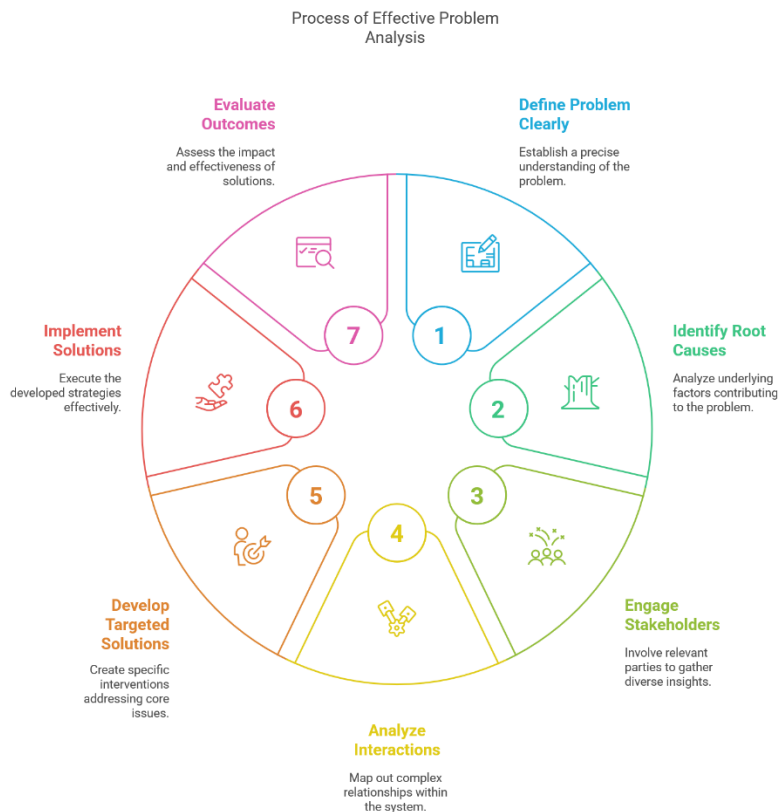


# Section 2: Problem Identification

The purpose of this section is to introduce the differences and importance of clarifying and identifying problems in complex system situations.

## The Importance of Clarity

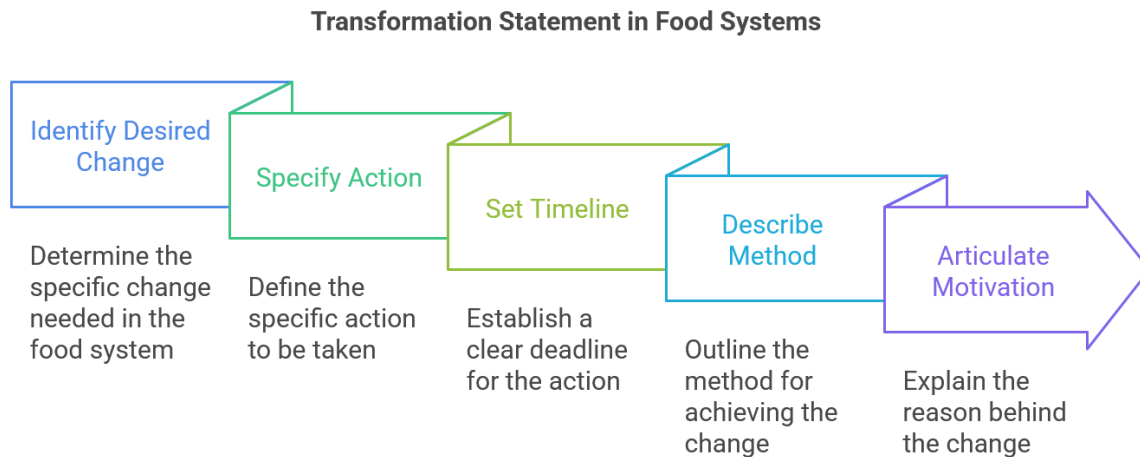


Poorly defined problems yield ineffective solutions by addressing symptoms, not root causes, wasting resources and perpetuating issues. For example, vague food insecurity understanding leads to short-term aid, ignoring systemic poverty and market failures.

Complex problems like childhood malnutrition and gender inequality are interconnected with food systems. Malnutrition links to sanitation, healthcare, and gender disparities. Gender inequality manifests as unequal access to land and decision-making. These require systems thinking to address multiple layers of influence.

Thus, thorough problem analysis is essential. This involves identifying root causes, actors, power dynamics, and interactions within the food system, through data gathering and stakeholder consultation. Deep analysis enables targeted, context-specific solutions, moving towards sustainable and equitable food systems.

## Exploring Transformation Statements



In the context of food systems, transformation statements are concise expressions of desired change. They articulate a specific action ("do what"), a defined timeline ("by when"), the method of achieving it ("how"), and the underlying motivation ("why"). Essentially, they serve as a roadmap for shifting from the current state to a desired future state. A well-crafted transformation statement goes beyond mere aspirations; it embodies a commitment to measurable, actionable change.

For example, rather than simply stating "reduce obesity," a transformation statement might declare, "To reduce childhood obesity, we will reduce sugar in food by 25% by 2030 by reformulating products." This statement provides clarity on the target, the timeframe, the strategy, and the ultimate goal, making it a robust tool for driving change. Moreover, it should adhere to SMART principles: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This clarity is essential for accountability and for motivating stakeholders to work towards a shared objective. It moves the conversation from vague wishes to concrete actions that can be measured and evaluated.

## Section 2 Review

Before moving on, take a moment to reflect on what you've learned in this section.

**Question 1:** Think of a complex challenge you face in your own professional context. Based on the text's emphasis on the importance of clear problem definition, how might a poorly defined understanding of this challenge be leading to ineffective or counterproductive solutions? Specifically, consider how you might be addressing symptoms rather than root causes, and how you could apply a 'systems thinking' approach to better understand the interconnected factors at play.

**Question 2:** Consider a desired change you wish to see within your own sphere of influence. Using the structure of a transformation statement (do what, by when, how, why), craft a statement that clearly articulates this change. How can the process of creating this statement help you focus your analysis, define the boundaries of the system you will work in, and facilitate alignment with the necessary stakeholders?

In the next section, we will be exploring how a food system can be described.

## Sources

Checkland, P. and Poulter, J., 2020. Soft systems methodology. Systems approaches to making change: A practical guide, pp.201-253.

Wilson, B., 2001. Soft systems methodology. Conceptual model building and its contribution, 35.