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**United Nations Food System
Summit: Pathways to Attain
Sustainable Access to Safe and
Nutritious Foods for All in
Sierra Leone**



**UNITED NATIONS
FOOD SYSTEMS
SUMMIT 2021**

Prepared by the FSS Technical Working Group



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United Nations Food System Summit: National Pathways to Attain Sustainable Access to Safe and Nutritious Foods for All in Sierra Leone

This document is work in progress that has been put together by the technical working group that was established to champion the national food systems dialogues to map the pathways for a sustainable food system in Sierra Leone

September 2021

United Nations Food System Summit: National Pathways to Attain Sustainable Access to Safe and Nutritious Foods for All in Sierra Leone

Introduction

The aim of the Summit is to deliver progress on all 17 of the SDGs through a food systems approach, leveraging the interconnectedness of food systems to global challenges such as hunger, climate change, poverty, and inequality. The Summit has been convened in recognition of the significance and complexity of food systems around the world and offers an opportunity for countries to identify pathways towards sustainable national food systems that will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sierra Leone viewed the invitation of the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations to participate in the global Food Systems Summit as a golden opportunity to reflect and identify bottlenecks in our current food system and how we can create a pathway to enhance a sustainable food system in reaching the SGD targets by 2030.

Establishing a pathway through a multi-sectoral approach for a nutrition sensitive and sustainable food systems in Sierra Leone required creating an inclusive dialogue process for awareness-raising and elevating public discourse, and reshaping national commitments based on those dialogues to accelerate progress in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Country food systems context

Sierra Leone has been categorized as fragile state with chronic food insecurity because of periodic disruption in our food systems because of natural disaster, disease outbreak and socioeconomic factors. Furthermore, our food systems are not resilient due to the increasing level of vulnerable population with high level food insecurity over the past 15 years as revealed by the Comprehensive Food Security Vulnerability Analysis reports in 2010 (45%), 2015 (50%) and 2020 (57%). All these factors contribute to the high malnutrition rate among children under the age of five years.

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing still accounts for the largest share of GDP at 61.29 % in 2020, according to the World Bank development indicators. The agriculture sector is also the largest employer, and accounts for over 70% of the current labour force. Most of the population of Sierra Leone lives in rural areas, trapped in a combination of low agricultural productivity and malnutrition, with approximately 70% living below the national poverty line, with 26% unable to meet the minimum consumption of 2,400 kilocalories required per day (GoSL, 2013). This suggests that Sierra Leone's economy can only be sustainably transformed, and its levels of poverty significantly stemmed, if the food systems productivity are duly scaled up.

One of the greatest challenges in our food system is to ensure that all people have access to sufficient and quality food to ensure food and nutrition security. The agriculture and fisheries systems are the main drivers to address this challenge. Our agricultural and fishery system is not producing adequate food and people are not earning enough to access enough nutritious and safe food that is affordable in all food economy zones. This suggests that Sierra Leone's economy can only be sustainably transformed, and its levels of poverty significantly stemmed, if the food systems productivity are duly scaled up.

Challenges of the national food systems

The major challenges of Sierra Leone's food systems include but are not limited to: low productivity due to limited availability of improved technologies and innovations including agricultural inputs- such innovations for improving livestock breeds and crops varieties, bio-fortification e.g. (with orange fleshed sweet potatoes, soybeans), food fortification (e.g. availability of fortified complementary foods), and usage of agricultural biodiversity (e.g. traditional leafy green vegetables); low levels of value chain integration mainly due to inefficient production systems that undercut competitiveness. In addition, there are mainly segmented markets across the country for inputs and outputs but not well organized/structured.; high interest rates for agricultural finance; low farmers' organizational capacity; and low institutional and organization capacity, especially for the provision of agricultural research information and development, extension, and advisory services.

Fuel (wood and charcoal) production is the most important forestry activity and provides a supplementary source of income for most farmers. The uncontrolled logging of trees to get woods/planks for construction and the export of woods practices have negative impact on the remaining 5% forest reserves may in future result to environment hazards.

The proliferation of fishing boats/trawlers with very little effective monitoring of their fishing techniques and nets in our territorial waters is a big challenge. Encroaching of people on the estuary and mangroves where fishes breed is serious concern and lead to low quality of fish and fishery products along our territorial waters.

Strength and opportunities of the national food systems

Sierra Leone is endowed with sufficient arable land of about 5.4 million hectare, or 74 percent of the total land area with favorable climatic conditions, reasonable access to land; several agro-ecologies suitable for wide variety of crops and forest products, abundant water resources for fisheries and aquatic investments and political commitment for investment in these sectors through Public Private Partnerships (PPP). The fisheries waters comprise of the marine ecosystem, inland water bodies such as rivers, estuaries, lakes and flood plains that are richly endowed with abundant and diverse species of finfish, shellfish and wetland resources (mangroves and wildlife).

There are a lot of opportunities for promoting small to large scale fisher-folks so that they benefit from linkages, to market economies. Sierra Leonean agricultural, forestry and fishery products have high demand at local, Mano River Union (MRU), ECOWAS and International Markets. So, there are a myriad of market opportunities for investing in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sectors in Sierra Leone.

The country is one of the world's top ten business reformers, having climbed into the top half of the Sub-Saharan index of ease of doing business within a 5-year period. There are key policies and legislations that support responsible investment in Agriculture and Food Systems in the country. The Anti-Corruption Commission is hard on corruption and adequate judiciary systems to protect responsible investments. There is a paradigm/policy shift towards government supporting private sector investment initiatives for the agriculture sector across various commodity value chains in the country. The banking systems are functional and can repatriate profits of investors to wherever they like with ease.

Government actions to sustainably improve national food systems

The New Direction Government understands “sustainable food system” as a system that ensures food security and good nutrition for all without compromising the economic, social, and environmental bases of such systems for future generation.

In fulfilment of mitigating the fragility of our food system, the government through the ministry of Agriculture has developed and now implementing the policy shift in a bid to transform our food systems along the food chain

However, this shift would not be at the expense of the small holder farmers, artisanal fisher-folks, and community foresters. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is in a transformation phase focusing on developing agricultural value chains: involving the private sector player in making available improved inputs (seeds and fertilizers); increasing productivity and production through advanced research, technologies, and innovations; and establishing crops and livestock processing zones across the country. This strategy is expected to address current high post-harvest losses, improve linkages with industry and access to financial services and markets. The approach also targets rural communities particularly women, the youth, and Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs), as well as improving rural institutions and infrastructure aimed at revitalizing rural communities.

Government has instituted a lot of fisheries reform to improve productivity and sustainability. Such reforms include mandatory observer programmes, fish health certification for access to EU market; fisheries protection including the issues of flag of convenience (FOC), port of convenience and the problem of piracy; by-catch regulations, catch origin regulation and transshipment arrangements; enforcement of fishing gear regulations; Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) including the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs).

Development partners’ actions to promote sustainable food systems

Development partners are working with the Government of Sierra Leone in improving livelihoods and nutrition through enhanced productivity and diversification along the food system value chain. This includes providing technical assistance with emphasis on the promotion of small, medium, and large-scale agribusinesses and selected commodities, while improving food security, nutrition, and food safety. They also support and promote responsible governance and sustainable management of natural resources. Over the years, there are supports in areas of policy work, infrastructural development, and gender equitable inclusiveness in all government programmes and building resilience structures in various thematic sectors. Such supports included but not limited to:

1. Promotion of innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture, natural resource management and climate change resilience in the context of national food security
2. Strengthening the policy-enabling environment, governance mechanisms and advocacy for the sustainable and equitable management of land, fisheries, and forestry sectors. Increasing resilience and social protection.
3. Supported and reinforced the country’s meteorological capacities for improved forecasting of rainfall, and to bolster collaboration with the Office for National Security (ONS) to support national disaster response.

Civil society actors' actions to promote sustainable food systems

The national and local food systems are performing poorly in Sierra Leone, not just in nutrition and health, but also with regards to environmental and social externalities. The role and knowhow in transforming food systems is poorly understood by the civil society or governmental stakeholders. Civil society organizations are expected to be the mouthpiece and whistle-blower for any environmental and social distortion in their society. Civil society are engaged mostly in reporting political stories and focus very little on environmental and social ills in their communities. The national food system dialogue was a golden opportunity for them to know their roles and responsibilities in sustaining healthy food systems.

Developing and improving value chains requires a comprehensive approach. By working in partnership, the private sector, financial institutions, and civil society can identify bottlenecks and find solutions. Civil society organizations and the authorities can provide valuable insight and expertise and can help secure the involvement of small-scale producers, thus promoting private sector development and contributing to poverty reduction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES

Main Objectives

The food systems dialogues had five principal objectives:

- 1) Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the food systems within the targets of continental (CAADP), sub-regional (ECOWAAP), and global (SDG 2 & 7).
- 2) Examine the policies, programmes, institutional capacities, and resources aimed at improving food systems in Sierra Leone.
- 3) Analyze the current state of such initiatives, and identify challenges and gaps in the response
- 4) Discuss and prioritize actions that will be required to address the challenges and fill response gaps and accelerate progress in strengthening the national food systems
- 5) Provide recommendations on how these actions may be implemented and at what levels.
- 6) Opportunity to reflect on global/regional commitments/benchmarks and take appropriate actions for the country.

In view of the current food systems situation, Sierra Leone is very committed to support the objectives of the summit including how our food systems will contribute to: the good health and nutrition of everyone; livelihoods of those working in food systems; resilience of people's lives and livelihoods in the face of climate change, health hazards including pandemics, violent conflicts and shocks, well-being of women and children (especially between conception and a child's second birthday); regeneration of natural ecosystems and substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Current from the conclusion of the national dialogues which was organized at regional level, key issues and challenges facing our food systems were identified along eleven thematic areas which offered an opportunity to identify pathways towards sustainable national food systems contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The pathways that can address the strategic issues/challenges identified during the national dialogues for implementation within the next three years to meet the defined expectations by 2030 will include:

1. Increasing agricultural production and productivity (intensification and diversification) among the rural poor smallholders, who constitute the poorest segment of society, through a variety of support measures along the entire agricultural value chain, from pre-planting to marketing.

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2. Establishment of supply chains for inputs such as fertilizers, integrated pest and diseases management equipment, irrigation facilities, high yielding seed varieties and livestock breeds, agro-processing and marketing equipment and distribution points by private sector actors.
 3. Promoting commercial agriculture through private sector participation by creating an enabling environment that is attractive for the private sector to invest.
 4. Promoting the elimination and minimization of post-harvest losses through the provision of storage facilities both by government and private sector in the form of storage, drying floors, rice mills, threshers, animal feed mills and abattoirs through loans, grants, and cost-sharing arrangements.
 5. Improving access to rural credit through establishment of Community Banks and Financial Services Associations, cooperatives, and other traditional credit schemes.
 6. Increasing investment both by government and private sector for building and rehabilitation of feeder and trunk roads, and community markets infrastructure to facilitate movement of goods to marketplaces.
 7. Reorganizing and training of food systems - based organizations to engage in productive commercial food systems activities and link to the market economy.
 8. Improving agricultural research, technology and innovations and extension delivery systems
 9. Formation of coalitions to support the consumption of healthy diets through implementation of nutrition sensitive agriculture.
 10. Promoting and enhancing food environments following international best practice to increase accessibility, affordability of healthy foods.
 11. Support programmes and actions directed to eliminate all forms of malnutrition in the country.
 12. Promoting capacity strengthening along the food production, processing, marketing and consumption value chains through massive nutrition education targeting the general population on healthy foods and healthy diets.
 13. Setting up an appropriate and robust food waste management systems to enhance a cleaner and healthier environment.
 14. Promoting efficient and effective sector resource management systems, including the establishment of a database for agricultural statistics as well as creating a sector coordination mechanism.
 15. Providing adequate surveillance capabilities, facilitating the lifting of the ban on fish exports to EU markets.
 16. Improving the infrastructure and support services for commercial fishing.
 17. Providing adequate extension support for artisanal fishermen and strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Marine Resources.
 18. Establishing sustainable financing mechanisms to support the food systems.

National action plan for food systems

One of the action points in the conclusion of the national food systems dialogue was to create an Action Plan for a Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) by the government and food systems stakeholders. Food security exists when all people have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences and enables them to lead active and healthy lives.

Such significant step will establish an official mechanism for presenting a food systems agenda and trajectory for the food and agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors. An Action Plan for SFS will connect existing country policy areas that impact or are impacted by food systems activities to support local or

national government in moving beyond simple siloed interventions to an integrated and comprehensive multi-stakeholder political effort. Furthermore, the Action Plan should create joint vision concerning the

expected sustainable food systems outcomes to be achieved (long-term vision), with a clear timeframe (milestones) upon which stakeholders agree. At the same time, it should specify ways for managing short- and medium-term necessities and change.

The overall objective of the proposed action plan is to ensure increased food and nutrition security through the development of sustainable food systems. This action plan will be a useful tool to achieve SDG 2 on ending hunger, while also supporting efforts to reach the other 16 SDGs. By taking a food systems approach, we can make progress towards several goals at the same time. There are clear links between the areas of food security, health, climate and environment. The action plan will recognize these links. It will be designed to strengthen the country’s efforts to improve food security and development policy. A logical framework is one of the tools to be used to clearly show results of the action plan for sustainable food systems.

Resource Mobilization to support food systems

Apart from its flagship programme of human capital development, the main trust of the government of Sierra Leone is focused on free quality education, combating hunger and raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity, ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources, bettering the lives of rural populations, and contributing to the growth of the national economy.

To operationalize the sustenance of food systems in Sierra Leone, there is need for intensive and extensive resource mobilization both human and financial. Resource mobilization is therefore an integral part of sustainable development. A robust innovative and sustainable financing mechanisms should be put in place. This mechanism should focus on:

- 1) Design and operationalize an investment framework for national sustainable food system, based on existing planning and policy processes.
- 2) Design of an innovative funding mechanism for non-state actors promoting sustainable food system at smallholder farmers’ level.
- 3) The design of a results-based funding mechanism for civil society along with the monitoring system for this mechanism.
- 4) Development of a private sector engagement and financing strategy incorporating a review of the current landscape of initiatives and programmes within the country. This strategy engages the private sector in CSA technology innovations and provides a proposal for how the financing mechanism should be designed to attract private finance.

In addition to the current food systems financing architecture in the country, the following financing sources could be helpful. The table below shows the financing architecture for sustainable food system.

Possible financing sources for sustainable food systems

No	Type of funding	Funding source
1	Domestic Public Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Budgets, • Local Councils

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives and other traditional financing mechanisms • State Owned Enterprises and Investment Vehicles, • National Agriculture Development Banks (Community Banks, FSAs)
2	Private sector financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector players • Private foundations • Philanthropists
3	Bilateral public	Dedicated Initiatives (UK ICF, etc.), Donors (US, EU, France, etc.)
4	Multilateral public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNFCCC (GEF, GCF, AF, etc.), • Non-UNFCCC (FCPF, ASAP, etc.) • UN Agencies
5	Development Finance Institutions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Development Banks, • Multilateral (IDFC, MDBs, etc.) • AfDB • World Bank
	Other International Organizations:	IFAD, UNEP, UNDP, etc.
	Regional & National Funds/Channels:	Amazon Fund, CBFF, etc., Fund for REDD+ Indonesia

CONCLUSION AND LOOKING FORWARD

The beginning of HE Julius Maada Bio's government was marked by increasing urbanization and corresponding pressure on land and water resources; greater demand for food quality and safety; climate change and the erosion of biodiversity; forest loss and overfishing; transboundary pests and diseases, plant and animal diseases and natural and human-induced disasters. The government with limited resources and capacity to respond to these challenges is working with development partners to proffer solutions on a priority basis.

Rural low-income producers and consumers of food in Sierra Leone are more vulnerable to climate change, owing to their comparatively limited ability to invest in more adapted institutions and technologies under increasing climatic risks. Therefore, the way we manage our food systems needs to be urgently changed if the goal is to achieve food security and sustainable development more quickly. Diversifying agriculture and tackling malnutrition at the same time sustaining the environment is a complicated and lengthy process that has been on the agenda for several years. This all-inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues around local or national food system issues is a move in the right direction. Shifting food culture from the status quo requires multiple actions, shared vision and an integrated approach. Therefore, a food systems transformation would further benefit from a formal government engagement mechanism to review outdated policies based on the outcomes and decisions of platforms.

A wide range of participants comprising, NGOs, MDAs, civil society organizations, research institutions, academia, and private sector players were invited for this dialogue to build consensus on the pathway to attain sustainable access to safe and nutritious foods for all.

Key outcomes from the national dialogue highlighted common problems /challenges/constraints of the food systems, possible solutions to address these challenges, ways of implementing these solutions, levers of change, players/partners to be involved and ways progress can be measured. Main areas of divergence were also identified with areas that needs further exploration, Practices that are needed for food systems sustainability and stakeholders whose interest should be prioritized.

It was agreed that, there is an ardent need to create an Action Plan for a Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) by the government and food systems stakeholders. Such significant step establishes an official mechanism for presenting a food systems agenda and trajectory for the food and agriculture sector. This action plan will connect existing country policy areas that impact or are impacted by food systems activities to support local or national government in moving beyond simple siloed interventions to an integrated and comprehensive multi-stakeholder political effort. Moreover, the Action Plan should create joint vision concerning the expected sustainable food systems outcomes to be achieved (long-term vision), with a clear timeframe upon which stakeholders agree. At the same time, it should specify ways for managing short-and medium-term necessities and change. Support and promotion of CSA, policy and financing systems for national, district and Regional Economic Communities (REC) are beginning to recognize this reality, as agriculture is prominently represented in National Adaptation Programmes of Actions (NAPAs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) as well as beginning to become more prominent in Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs). It is imperative to create an Inter-sectoral platform including CSO, NGOs and women organizations to ensure participatory, integrated and harmonized technical interventions and practices, inclusive knowledge and evidence-based systems. There is the need to create community based adaptation support units to encourage Community participation including none State actors-CSO & Private sector and active role for women in all livelihood development initiatives.

The government is committed to the common position of AUC-NEPAD. The government has focused on agriculture-led growth as a main strategy for national development and to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day (MDG1) by pursuing a 6% average annual agricultural total factor growth. Although the country has not achieved the allocation of 10% of national budgets to the agricultural sector, it is gradually increasing budget allocation to agriculture and exploiting regional and sub-regional complementarities and cooperation to boost growth. The country is also adopting the principles of policy efficiency, dialogue, review, accountability and strengthening and expanding partnerships and alliances to include farmers, agribusiness, and civil-society communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Current food systems are not on a sustainable trajectory that will enable us to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The major weakness is related to production techniques that are still crude with very little innovations to meet nutritional targets, inclusivity, and environmental sustenance. The following were agreed recommended solutions for sustainable food systems.

- 1) The implementation of relevant climate-smart technologies and practices to reroute farming and rural livelihoods to new climate-resilient and low-emission trajectories.

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- 2) The development and implementation of Weather and Climate Information Services (WCIS) for Early Warning Systems (EWS) that support de-risking of livelihoods, farms, and value chains in the face of increasing vagaries of weather and extreme events.
 - 3) The use of climate-smart options that minimize waste of all the natural resources used for growing, processing, packaging, transporting, and marketing food, and therefore mitigating the carbon footprint attached to this food loss and waste.
 - 4) Promoting and enhancing food environments following international best practice to increase accessibility, affordability of healthy foods.
 - 5) Investment in the energy sector to support energy requirements along the food systems chain using different strategies including both renewable and non-renewable energies.
 - 6) Capacity strengthening along the food production, processing, marketing, and consumption value chains through massive nutrition education targeting the general population on food safety, healthy foods, and healthy diets.
 - 7) Setting up an appropriate and robust food waste management systems to enhance a cleaner and healthier environment.
 - 8) Promoting efficient and effective sector resource management systems, including the establishment of a database for agricultural statistics as well as creating a sector coordination mechanism.
 - 9) Providing adequate surveillance capabilities, facilitating the lifting of the ban on fish exports to EU markets.
 - 10) Improving the infrastructure and support services for commercial fishing.
 - 11) Establishing sustainable financing mechanisms to support the food systems.
 - 12) Restructure and strengthen the capacity of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Secretariat in the Presidency to ensure multi-sectoral coordination of the food systems and the implementation of the Action Plan.

National Food Systems Dialogue Process - Photo Gallery



Briefing meeting with donors and other key stakeholders on the concept of the UNFSS national dialogues



FSS National dialogue planning meeting – Technical Working Group, May 2021



Western area Inception Meeting



NATIONAL FOOD SYSTEM DIALOGUE WESTERN AREA
Theme: "Building Consensus on the Pathway to Attain Sustainable Access to Safe and Nutritious Foods for All"

13-14TH JULY 2021



Banner for Regional dialogues



First National FSS Regional Dialogue opening Session – Western Area



Radio and phone in discussion programme on the FSS Regional dialogue in the southern Region



Validation of National Dialogues Synthesis Report



Group work session during validation of synthesis report