

Guyana's National High-Level Dialogue in Preparation for the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit

Messages on Action track 1: Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all

Message 1: The Ministry of Health is developing a strategic plan that is focused on projections over the next 10 years, with nutrition playing an important role. The Ministry of Health is therefore looking to partner closely with international partners in order to benefit from expertise as we try to improve our food systems across Guyana.

MESSAGE 2: Studies show that Guyana has a comparative advantage in the Caribbean in meat production. However, even though the country is self-sufficient in meat production, it imports meat products due to a misalignment between quality standards for local production and those required by the fast-food industry and other international buyers. Another area of concern is nutrition as it relates to the fast growth of the fast-food markets and processed meat consumption, despite the economic opportunities that a cattle industry that meets international standards might bring to the agrifood sector.

MESSAGE 3: The current food system makes 'ultra-processed' foods readily accessible, affordable, appealing and aspirational, creating an environment that displaces more nutritious foods; particularly impacting children and adolescence.

MESSAGE 4: With regards to ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all, one of the main challenges that Guyana faces is food waste and loss. Estimates indicate that 20 percent of cassava, a main staple, 34 percent of tomatoes and 30 percent of all fruits and vegetables produced in the country are not consumed. Guyana must seek to reduce on-farm and post-harvest food waste and loss by promoting the adaptation of harvesting, post-harvest and storage technologies that reduce food loss. Notably, the issue of food safety is being addressed through the now established Guyana Food Safety Authority. Further, an enabling environment for a circular food economy must be established: this entails developing and implementing strategies (at the regional and national scale) to reduce per capita food waste at household, food service and retail levels by 2030 (SDG target 12.3) and transitioning to a circular food economy where waste becomes a resource.

MESSAGE 5: An existing challenge is that some households lack the minimum financial resources needed to access sufficient high-quality food. As such, there is need to scale up protection programmes by expanding their reach, enhancing financing, improving delivery capabilities, and making systems more adaptive to crises to ensure access to safe and nutritious food by all.

MESSAGE 6: Programmes such as the National School feeding programme can be expanded to strengthen connections between consumers and producers of food, including by fostering development of more robust food value chains where feasible, creating solid alliances between farmers and civil society and harnessing the potential of food markets (including farmers' markets) to deliver safe, healthy and sustainable diets.

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MESSAGE 7: Being able to access a safe and nutritious diet promotes a healthy population. When people do not have access to a safe and nutritious diet the population often faces a range of issues, such as Malnutrition, Low birth weight, Micronutrient deficiencies in pregnancy, Post-natal development low. In addition, we must also avoid over nutrition. This often leads to obesity in the population which can also cause a number of health issues.

MESSAGE 8: Low birth weight is another problem associated with nutrition that should be reduced or, if possible, be eliminated. We know that LBW can lead to increase perinatal/neonatal/ post-natal mortality, increase morbidity, increase developmental delays and neurological complications, an increase in learning disabilities and an increase in chronic diseases when these children develop as adults. To reduce LBW, it is important that women's diet is monitored during the antenatal period and fetal development to ensure that the development is in keeping with the gestational age.

MESSAGE 9: It is important we move to changing the composition of the adult diet to include more dietary fiber (fruits, vegetables, grains and cereals). Studies have shown that optimum intake of fiber can lower Low Density Lipoprotein levels and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, reduce the risk of diabetes II, and attenuate the glucose absorption rate and reducing weight gain. It can also reduce the prevalence of lower colorectal cancer. And the prebiotic effects of fermentable fibers can contribute to a health gut microbiome. For adults to reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, the introduction of the PAHO/WHO program -HEARTS – promotes, healthy diet, food groups, portion sizes, sodium restriction, appropriate caloric intake, understanding fats and the reduction of trans fats.

MESSAGE 10: The capacities of key institutions and the private sector must be developed to meet private or international sanitary and phytosanitary standards or food safety requirements, which are needed to access high-value markets. Further, upgraded capacities in the areas of logistics, ICTs and infrastructure in ports and close to production areas is required to minimize damages to perishables and that contributes to food loss.

MESSAGE 11: There is the need for economic measures in support of food environments that provide access to affordable, healthy diets, encourage food product reformulation and drive shift to sustainable consumption.

Messages on Action track 2: Shifting to sustainable consumption patterns

MESSAGE 12: A sustainable consumption lifestyle and diet changes can be supported through the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy that includes: reviewing school and workplace programmes, economic incentives and labelling, and aligning national dietary guidelines with the current scientific evidence on healthy eating and the environmental impacts of our diet.

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MESSAGE 13: Utilization of sales tax and or pricing policies can be used to promote healthier diets: The development of effective pricing policies and/ or sales tax can influence the demand for foods high in saturated fat, trans fats, sugar or salt and to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Trade policies and input subsidy programs are needed to incentivize changes in consumption patterns of nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables. This also imply improvement of food safety to reduce non-tariff trade measures to increase the availability of healthy food options, thereby promoting healthy eating across all administrative regions in Guyana.

MESSAGE 14: The Government must find ways to off-set the costs associated with transitioning to healthy and sustainable consumption (e.g. supporting farmers, food businesses and workers that are negatively affected by change; redirecting funding; providing public infrastructure funds; facilitating access to loans and encouraging the private sector to invest). Effective policies and appropriate investment (government and private) are needed across food supply chains (food storage, road infrastructure, food preservation capacity, etc.) to cut losses and enhance efficiencies to lower the production cost of nutritious food.

Messages on Action track 3: Boosting nature-positive production at scale

MESSAGE 15: In order for Guyana to have sustainable development in agriculture, it is important that farmers move from low yielding farming activities to higher yielding farming activities that will have larger returns. This should be done at the same time with special emphasis on activities that minimize the use of fresh water and other resources. Another aspect in which farmers should focus on; is how to use the required amount of fertilization when farming. This is to make sure excessive amounts aren't used in farming practices.

MESSAGE 16: Data indicates that adopting healthy and more plant-based diets could reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of the food system by more than half, and also reduce other environmental impacts, such as those from fertilizer application and the use of cropland and freshwater, by a tenth to a quarter.

MESSAGE 17: Changes in the agrifood sector sees growth in food crops such as rice, vegetables and livestock, which offer opportunities for farmers and local agrifood enterprises, improved food security and nutrition, but also raise concerns about environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

Messages on Action track 4: Advancing equitable livelihoods

MESSAGE 18: Guyana's agriculture land and water resources strategically positions the agriculture sector to optimize production and harvesting opportunities. The agriculture industry comprises of 5 principal subsectors namely: rice, sugar, fruits and vegetables, livestock and fisheries. Sugar and rice

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are the most dominant and contributes significantly to creating sustainable livelihoods for thousands of Guyanese.

MESSAGE 19: It must be ensured that the food system in Guyana leaves no one behind by addressing inequality as one of the root causes of poverty in Guyana: inequality in access to economic opportunities, gender inequality and inequality in access to productive resources and services that restrict the advancement of equitable livelihoods.

MESSAGE 20: Integrated value chain development programmes can assist farmers and local agri-enterprises to access high value chains. Different approaches are possible, but all require close collaboration with the private sector. One approach might be to provide blended finance solutions and concessional loans or subsidies (e.g. as part of public-private partnerships) to hotel and restaurant chains to help develop the sustainable domestic food value chains that could leverage the high value tourist sector. This typically would include providing training and technology transfer to farmers and food companies to help them comply with public and private standards for quality, quantity, safety, and reliability, in addition to requiring investments in ICTs, green energy, cold chains and upgraded ports.

MESSAGE 21: FAO is already adopting an agrifood systems approach, for its support to the agrifood sector. An example is the Fish4ACP project (2020-2024) which is focused on enhancing the environmental sustainability, productivity, competitiveness and social inclusion of the Atlantic seabob fishery in Guyana. This support builds on the global leadership role of Guyana as sea bob exporter. This support envisages the opening up of new markets for small and medium enterprises, including for bycatch and waste; improved safety and workers' rights and strengthened role of women and youth.; a more environmentally sustainable fish sector through reduced bycatch of endangered species; and help to businesses to access blended sources of finance and investment.

MESSAGE 22: A challenge for small and medium-sized companies (SME's) is barriers in accessing financing. And financing options do not necessarily incentivize them to sustainably produce nutritious foods. A proposed solution is the launch a multi-donor-funded financing facility to provide catalytic capital to a range of actors and institutions investing in agri-food SME's or supporting their capacity to develop viable business models that contribute to positive impact in food systems (e.g. equity).

MESSAGE 23: The need to develop social safeguards, legislation and governance mechanisms, working with indigenous and local communities (especially the most vulnerable) to secure their rights (notably access to land, water and genetic resources), with particular regard for rural women.

MESSAGE 24: Agrifood systems transformations can play a major role in eradicating poverty, in particular rural poverty, so long as they are inclusive and sustainable. Food networks that span the rural-urban continuum present an opportunity to support inclusive and sustainable rural transformation by leveraging urban demand for food and improved rural-urban and territorial linkages, while at the same time addressing urban food security and nutrition and social inequalities.

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MESSAGE 25: It is imperative that global financial institutions and organizations cooperate towards responsible investment in food value chains. This will enable the organizing of emerging value chains to provide equitable and decent participation by all, including small farmers and fisher folks. In this context, public finance can play an important role in supporting rural transformation and investment in food systems, mitigating risks and attracting more private sector investments.

MESSAGE 26: Livelihoods in food systems also include wages, labor and business along food value chains, and international migrant workers who often have less access to services or support due to their different citizenship status. Therefore, policies, strategies and actions advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems needs to recognize and respond to the specific constraints faced by disadvantaged groups, including the rural population, youths, women and migrants.

MESSAGE 27: Offshore Oil Discovery will create an immense inflow of foreign revenues with major impact expected on labour, prices, and competitiveness of the agricultural sector (IMF, 2019).

Messages on Action track 5: Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses

MESSAGE 28: Agrifood systems are highly dependent on the natural resources and are affected by climate change, but also contribute highly to their degradation and to exacerbating the effects of climate change.

MESSAGE 29: Climate change has had a devastating effect on Guyana's cash crop farmers, therefore the Ministry of Agriculture with the collaboration of NAREI is looking to develop climate smart practices that farmers can implement. This is to help deal with the adverse effects of climate change that farmers may face. One measure the government has implemented to help deal with climate change is that of the building of 100 shade houses across the country.

MESSAGE 30: Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress is necessary to address challenges that threaten a sustainable food system. Challenges such as COVID 19 which has exposed the vulnerability of food production and distribution systems, especially to the most vulnerable and to rural population and has exacerbated other challenges such as the threat of Climate Change. Guyana must put measures in place to promote de-risking of the agriculture sector and the improvement of transport and logistics.

MESSAGE 31: The disruptions of the COVID-19 crisis have highlighted many of the fragilities of contemporary agrifood systems. Challenges include: access to safe, nutritious food at affordable prices, especially when movement is restricted and markets are closed, the vulnerability of employees across the agrifood system, and even the survival of firms and industries, particularly MSMEs, from producers, manufacturers, traders and food processors to transporters and retailers.

MESSAGE 32: Guyana's economy has grown over the past two decades, although more recently at a slower rate, due to falling international prices for some important commodities such as gold and

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sugar. Despite this, natural resource rents in Guyana still represent around 20 percent of GDP and make the country extremely vulnerable to external shocks and market fluctuations.

MESSAGE 33: Guyana's agriculture is more diversified but prevailing dependency on limited number of export commodities exposes the agricultural sector to higher prices and market risks (FAO and CDB, 2019). The loss of Preferential Access to EU Market in 2009 is still causing reverberations in the sugar sector, with implications for ongoing restructuring across the entire agrifood sector (FAO and CDB, 2019)

MESSAGE 34: The threat of rising Sea Levels are also threatening Guyana's coastal area which is home to 90% of population and major agricultural areas (Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

MESSAGE 35: To build a resilient food system, Guyana needs to ensure that national food systems are regenerative and circular. Interventions should have a regional (administrative) context, identifying the weaknesses at the regional and national scale. It needs to be inclusive, taking into consideration indigenous knowledge while building on existing systems (cultural, environmental, social, and economic) and coping mechanisms.

MESSAGE 36: Relevant innovation and technological tools must be introduced to assess food systems, identify risks and relevant actions to manage food system shocks and to increase the resilience of food systems in Guyana.

MESSAGE 37: Disaster preparedness must focus on identifying and addressing long-term and structural causes (unfair and unequal distribution of resources or unsustainable agricultural practices) as compared to sudden shocks (droughts, etc). Increasing investments are needed to improve food security and resilience of food systems. In Guyana, increase in investments can help foster the development of resilience to vulnerabilities in food systems. Investments can provide training to farmers to improve their farming practices. Updating of the Agriculture Disaster Risk Management Plan.

Cross-Cutting Messages

MESSAGE 38: An Agrifood Systems approach has emerged in response to the challenges facing the agrifood system that have just been highlighted. Traditionally, a sectoral approach has prevailed, with attention focusing on primary production and economic entry points. Consumers were not considered in response to challenges, and the social and environmental dimensions were often insufficiently addressed. An agrifood system approach embraces the complexity we face, addressing the interconnectedness and trade-offs between social, economic and environmental impacts.

MESSAGE 39. Taking a system's approach therefore means considering all parts together. At the center of this interconnected web, innovation and technologies are noted as accelerators for progress and play an essential role. In order to manage accelerators of change, partnerships also need to be

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highlighted in order to deal with different interest groups. Public and private sectors and civil society organizations, consumer organizations, parliamentarians, research and academic institutions all play a role in accelerating change.

MESSAGE 40: Guyana's food system transformation is at the core of our development aspirations. Over the coming years, the Government of Guyana will strive to ensure that all activities of our sectors and subsectors, particularly the agriculture sector, are geared towards the goal of transforming our agri-food system to be more sustainable. We envision a modernized e-agriculture sector with enhanced incomes, enhanced productivity, value-addition, increased market access, and the production of safe and nutritious agricultural commodities that Guyana will produce for itself and the global market.

MESSAGE 41: There is the need to resolve structural/organizational barriers within institutions and policies, with the aim of achieving lasting change so that food systems can lead to equitable, sustainable livelihoods, rather than just temporary or seasonal increases in opportunities.

MESSAGE 42: The Food Systems needs to be significantly transformed to meet the food requirements of a growing population and new consumption patterns while taking care our health and the planet. This represents an opportunity for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry to move towards new forms of sustainable production, driving technology and innovations in the face of these challenges. This transformation requires effective public initiative, investment, research and partnership to challenge the way food is produced and consumed. It also implies better access to data and knowledge and improved governance in the balance of all interest by the actors involved in the food system.

MESSAGE 43: CARICOM Agri-Food System Strategy seeks to address a number of key areas which will drive the transformation of the agri-food system in Guyana and the region. These areas include but are not limited to the complete removal of all technical barriers to trade, the implementation of E-Agriculture Strategy, investments in production, research and development, measures to promote de-risking of the sector and the improvement of transport and logistics.