

NATIONAL PATHWAY FRAMEWORK

TO TRANSFORM FOOD SYSTEMS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG)

1. UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

The UN Food Systems Summit is an important global event that evolved from a logical, decisive and strategic foresight of the UN Secretary General who announced at the World Food Day in 2019 (16th October) that the Food Systems Summit will be held this year (2021). Central to this call, the ‘Decade of Action for the SDGs’ was to start in 2021 which will strategically position and prepare UN Member States to transform their respective food systems, thus achieving the SDGs as creating sustainable food systems is at the very heart of the SDGs. It is a laudable and timely event announced through the wisdom of the Secretary General, supported by all UN Agencies and multilateral organizations, including powerful world economies to keep the world awakened, targeted and focused towards a healthier, resilient, equitable and sustainable food systems, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing climate crises and the global population boom. These vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses have further undermined the performance of economies and in effect, uncovered staggering levels of inequalities, including their capabilities to build social, economic and environmental resilience, which remains the central aspect of sustainable development. And PNG, like other Member countries, is part of this movement and is thereby committed to participate, collaborate and work in consortia with international development partners, multilateral bodies, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples and other constituencies for a prosperous planet, better human health and wellbeing. Equally, Member Countries are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a more sustainable, resilient and productive pathway.

To guide Member countries prepare for the Food Systems Summit, five (5) Action Tracks have been developed so that there is universality of engagement, communication and coherence across regional and global programs and events, with the progressive development of the National Pathways to transform their food systems. These Action Tracks are guided by seven principles of engagement, all of which are underpinned by the Summit’s vision of an equitable and healthy future for all and contribute to the progressive realization of the right to food. On top of the five (5) Action Tracks, PNG has introduced a sixth Action Track as cross-cutting lever-of-change targeting women and youth as key players to be involved in transforming our national food systems. This objective will significantly increase the participation of women and young people in ensuring equitable livelihoods and the socio-economic development of the country.

The convening of the Food Systems Summit will set the pace for countries to improve on their weaknesses and build on existing strengths and synergies, reinforce coalitions and expand partnerships to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For PNG, the development of this National Pathway will lay a solid foundation for a renewed, regenerative and productive work to begin in reaching the different, yet interlinked targets ascribed in the SDGs by 2030 and beyond, including PNG’s development aspirations.

2. EXPECTATIONS FOR MEMBER COUNTRIES

The 193 UN member countries are expected to conduct their own national dialogues in preparation for the Food Systems Summit. The dialogues are supposed to bring in all stakeholders from across government sectors, development partners, civil society, academia and research organizations, private sector and industry partners, women and youth organizations, farmers, fishers, herders or pastoralists’ groups, consumer groups and other key stakeholders who are part of the food systems¹.

¹ Food systems is defined as all manner of activities that take place from the production of food, obtained from farms/gardens, waters and oceans (collectively called ‘blue foods’) and the processing of these foods, transporting these foods to markets for sale and finally consuming them or reused as by-products to produce new products. The process of utilizing the excess food to minimize food wastes or loss at the harvest, production, processing or consumption stage is a direct application of the concept of ‘blue economy’ which is currently the global development focus (refining green economy) and attempts to shift to responsible sustainable consumption and production, low carbon emissions, accelerated economic growth, enhanced social equity, including efforts to minimize environmental degradations. This is the core of the sustainable development agenda. Blue foods undeniably make up almost half of the foods produced and consumed globally, the other half is derived on land in gardens, farms and plantations.

The convening of the dialogues underpins the primary activity where all key stakeholders are gathered to share their views and experiences to improve their food systems. The dialogues are a core element of the Summit process. They explore and identify opportunities, priorities and ambitious actions to be taken for a better future.

The dialogue brings together participants from all parts of the society to share evidence and experiences and draw in new ideas towards developing an inclusive, productive and sustainable food systems while also safeguarding the planet. Every stakeholder must be engaged in the dialogue process because everyone is part of the food system and it is important to gather all their views so the actions are thoroughly owned and passionately driven by these important and relevantly different actors. That is why it is called the ‘Peoples Summit’ or the ‘Solutions Summit’ where everyone is needed to collectively explore, identify, discuss and agree on the pathway plans, strategic actions and priorities, including game-changing solutions for a sustainable future. These actors will specifically decide on what needs to be done or changed and how they can all work together to change their food systems. Essentially, this process and the post-Summit are intended to build a better world based on inclusive growth, environmental sustainability and social justice where no one is hungry, no one is poor and where no one is left behind. PNG is part of this global movement and must be fully committed in contributing to reaching the anticipated outcomes of these global goals (SDGs) and the collective vision of prosperity for all mankind.

3. DIALOGUES CONVENED

As required by the Secretariat of the UN Food Systems Summit, PNG has successfully convened two sub-national (regional) dialogues and a National Dialogue. On the 4th of April 2021, the National Convener from the Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAL) was appointed under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Country Office, the UN Agency that was tasked by the UN Resident Coordinator in Papua New Guinea to coordinate and oversee convening of the dialogues and monitor progress entailing preparations for the September Summit.

The first sub-national dialogue was successfully organized and held on the 13th of May 2021 at the Lae International Hotel (Lae) that converged key stakeholders from Morobe, Madang and the Highlands Provinces. The second regional dialogue held on the 15th of July 2021 in Port Moresby at the Hilton Hotel also brought together all Provincial DAL and Disaster Coordinators, Regional Directors, farmers and fishers, civil society representatives, private sector, youth and women groups from the New Guinea Islands and Southern Regions who were gathered to consult, discuss and exchange viewpoints, suggestions and key propositions that can be consolidated into developing this National Pathway. The dialogues are based on participants’ unique experiences, studies and observations from their involvement and the work they undertake directly or indirectly in the food systems process.

The convening of the National Dialogue on the 15th of July 2021 in Port Moresby concluded PNG’s official preparation to attending the Pre-Summit (in Rome) as well as the September Summit in New York (23rd), which will likely be convened in conjunction with the 76th UN General Assembly.

4. ASSESSING OUR FOOD SYSTEMS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

PNG’s agriculture sector is largely underdeveloped, although it has a sizable landmass in the region. More than 80% of the population in PNG live in rural areas and are largely dependent on subsistence agriculture which accounts for nearly 30% of GDP. It is the rural-based smallholder farmers that mostly produce food crops for self-consumption, communal exchange (barter system) and at times used for commercial purposes. The few plantations that are continued to be maintained throughout the country are able to produce commodities such as coffee, tea, rubber, oil palm, cocoa, vanilla and coconut. The livestock sub-sector (which produces protein meat, dairy products and egg) is a growing industry in PNG which nonetheless needs increased investment and adequate management for large-scale productions for domestic consumption as well as for exports. Coupled with the unequal distribution and unavailability of adequate protein meat in the Highlands/Mainland areas of PNG, unlike the coastal areas is a huge task for the government.

The fresh produce sub-sector had not performed well until recently. For example, the value of domestic fresh produce was PGK 2.5 billion in 2013 (FPDA Stats). The fresh produce that is produced in proportionately large quantities, could be potentially redistributed to other areas experiencing food deficit or for exports, thereby lessening the increasing costs or burden on imports.

Agriculture in PNG remains the most productive economic activity that continues to sustain people's livelihood and has enabled family stability and community survival for many years. Although it has potential to become the most economically viable sector, successive governments have not aggressively invested in growing the sector, unlike the fisheries sector. The option of commercializing the agriculture sector had never been preferred by the government over the years. This is not supposed to be the case if the government is seriously considering transforming the food systems and sustaining livelihoods of the rural majority.

It is believed the introduction of the Decentralization Policy in the 1990s (which established the Provincial Governments), the creation of Commodity Boards (Institutions), the enactment of the Organic Law on Provincial and Local-Level Governments and recently, the creation of the District Development Authorities (DDA) are the underlying causes of the dysconnectivity that hampered the effective delivery of goods and services to the people, including more accountability and transparency of the public service machinery (NADP). It is also partly attributed to the lack of coordination by a Central Coordinating Agency (which is supposed to be the Dept. of Agriculture and Livestock) to administer and oversee all the functions and performance of Agriculture Agencies such as the Commodity Boards, Coffee Industry Corporation, Fresh Produce Development Agency, Livestock Development Corporation, National Agriculture Research Institute, National Agriculture Quarantine Inspection Authority and others.

There is no consistency in the supply of fresh produce as the supply chain factors had, in recent years, never been attended to, leaving a vacuum for more investment to fully grow the sector. Road links to the markets are not in usable states (disconnecting rural areas to town markets) coupled with the increasing costs of freight costs for air and sea transport; farmers do not receive the relevant technical and financial support (e.g., through capacity building, microcredit financing or mechanization support); post-harvest or supply chain cold storage facilities continue to remain a huge problem and the private sector partners have not been able to forge greater partnerships with local farmers and the government to increase fresh produce production, including livestock (cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, chicken).

Access to land and developing the customary lands for farming purposes had never been easy because traditional landowners do not allow their land to be leased to private companies to do farming for commercial purposes. Educating the customary landowners to form Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs), for instance, and lease their land to potential investors for agricultural investments can be a long-term gain for the landowners. The prospect of increased employment and business opportunities in these communities, coupled with improved road conditions, electricity, water supply or other utility services are spin-off benefits that will be produced by such projects. Enabling 'land mobilization' laws to develop customary lands are not practically clear to the local communities and indigenous peoples and require proper awareness to be carried out, with consistency of support needed to maximize investments on land (esp. for commercial farming purposes).

Ninety-seven (97) percent of land in PNG is still customarily owned and is undeniably enough to produce food in large quantities that can feed the entire Asia-Pacific region. More so, PNG needs more investment in developing the domestic supply and value chains of fresh produce and livestock, with the aim of producing and making available nutritious and healthy foods to the wider population. At the same time, PNG is not ready to export its high-value products (with exception to some fisheries products such as tuna) due largely to issues relating to biosecurity, no clear regulatory framework for imports/exports and meeting of international food safety standards (such as Codex). The government's commitment to introducing the Biosecurity Policy/Bill through NAQIA, for instance, is notably a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, nutritional problems such as underweight, stunting, wasting, vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency disorders and anemia continue to impede the socio-economic development of PNG. In addition, the emergence of overweight and obesity, and other lifestyle diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer threaten to derail the overall socio-economic development of PNG society (National Nutrition Policy). It is now imperative for PNG to improve the nutrition status, especially for the vulnerable groups, which is a prerequisite for a healthy and productive nation.

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITY ACTIONS

5.1. Empowerment of women and youth

Women and youth have immense abilities (e.g. entrepreneurial skills, willingness and drive) which can be harnessed in food systems transformation and increased socio-economic development in the country.

5.2. Collaboration with the Education Sector

Mainstreaming agriculture in the National Education Curriculum with a greater focus on food safety, nutrition and healthy diets for children, entrepreneurship, climate-smart agriculture practices, and environmental sustainability will be the priority of the government.

5.3. Innovation, Technology and Scientific Research

Key enablers to transforming our food systems are innovation, technology and scientific research which PNG will greatly invest in the Decade of Action period (2021 – 2030) and beyond.

5.4. Address vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses without degrading the natural environment

Protecting biodiversity, regenerating natural ecosystems and enhancing agroecological systems of the environment, while improving the availability of early-warning (preparedness) and disaster response systems will underpin key priorities of the government while addressing climate variability and extremes, geothermal activities, pandemics and other evolving emergencies and unknown shocks.

5.5. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

PNG recognizes the need for a wide range of stakeholder engagement and partnerships to address complex issues of food security, hunger and malnutrition in all its forms.

5.6. Agriculture Downstream Processing

The long-term plan of the government will be to downstream the agriculture and livestock sector

6. ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMS

This National Pathway Framework is consistent with the broader development goals of PNG such as the Vision 2050, PNG Development Strategic Plan (PNG DSP) 2010 – 2030, Strategy for Responsible Sustainable Development; the Medium-Term Development Plan III 2018 – 2022, Agriculture Medium Term Development Plan 2020 – 2022, PNG National Health Plan 2011 – 2020, PNG Child Health Policy and Plan 2009 – 2020, National Agriculture Development Plan; public policies such as the National Trade Policy 2017 – 2032, National Nutrition Policy 2016 – 2026 and other relevant policies, programmes and strategies.

7. COALITION PARTNERS

The Coalition Partners include the Department of Agriculture and Livestock, National Fisheries Authority, Department of Education, National Department of Health, Dept of Foreign Affairs & International Trade, PNG National Forest Authority, Climate Change & Development Authority, Conservation and Environment Protection Authority, Dept. of National Planning & Monitoring, National Institute of Standards and Industrial Technology, National Agriculture Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA), Fresh Produce Development Agency, National Agriculture Research Institute, Department of Prime Minister & National Executive Council, Department of Transport, Department of Finance, Treasury, Department of Community Development and Religion, National Youth Authority, National Development Bank, Bank of Papua New Guinea (Central Bank), FAO, WFP, WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, DFAT/ACIAR, USAID, European Union, IFAD, ADB, IFC and the World Bank.

8. FINANCING OPTIONS

Based on these national strategic priorities, PNG will source domestic and international financing and identify credible investors to support national programs, broadly with the aim of addressing the setbacks and challenges identified in this document. We will continue to work with our traditional partners such as the appropriate UN Agencies, European Union, IFAD, ADB, DFAT/ACIAR (through the PNGAusPartnership), USAID and the World

Bank to address food insecurity, hunger, poverty alleviation, health, education and nutrition, including targeting the double-burden of diseases.

9. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Push for the government to approve and gazette the Food Security Policy and implement without delay, including reviewing other relevant policies (e.g. National Nutrition Policy) to ensure their intended results are achieved.
- ii. Reintegrating traditional knowledge with science and policy (mixes) to enhance and strengthen the processes and linkages between production, processing and consumption so nutritious and healthy foods are readily available, accessed and afforded by everyone.
- iii. UNICEF, WHO and other development partners to work closely with the National Department of Health and other sectors to develop intervention programs that can specifically address underweight, obesity (overweight), stunting, wasting, Vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency disorders and anemia in PNG.
- iv. Increase tariffs on unhealthy imported foods or totally ban them and encourage food fortifications (i.e. through introduction of a separate law) and increase awareness for people to revert to local healthy foods.
- v. Establish an independent ‘Consumer Protection’ body in PNG, governed by its own laws and regulations.

10. THE FUTURE OF FOOD SYSTEMS IN PNG

Fisheries and agriculture (including livestock) remain the primary source of production systems that impacts on the socio-economic development and sustainable livelihoods of the rural population and peri-urban communities in PNG. Unlike fisheries, agriculture is not fully developed and needs timely intervention to increase national productions in both cash crops and food crops and less dependent on imports, thus improving our local food systems.

For now, all constituents must work together to build the adaptive capacity of agriculture and fisheries resources in times of shocks and stresses including developing disaster response strategies, enhance local supply chains and greater market accessibility. PNG needs to have an inclusive, sustainable, healthy and resilient food systems and an informed population.