

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 2019 World Food Day 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 creating sustainable food systems which 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 UN Member States, 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 States are determined to take 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 targeting women and youth as key players to be involved in transforming PNG’s 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. Another deliverable outcome to be achieved through the Food Systems Summit process is the forming of ‘Coalitions’ by relevant Ministers for food systems change. Annexed herewith is the draft ‘Declaration of Commitment’ for relevant Ministers to sign as a commitment to implement the key priority actions and recommendations. The ‘Declaration of Commitment’ will be signed by relevant Ministers after the Summit.

2. EXPECTATIONS FOR MEMBER STATES

The 192 UN Member States 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.

The convening of the dialogues gathers all key stakeholders to share their views and experiences to improve their food systems. The dialogues are a core element of the Summit process because they explore and identify opportunities, priorities and ambitious actions to be taken for a transformed food systems and 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 March 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 the 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 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

¹ Food systems is defined as all manner of activities that take place from the production of food, obtained from fresh water, seas and oceans (collectively called 'blue foods'), gardens and farms and the processing of these foods, transportation of 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.

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 (or farms) that are 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 both domestic consumption as well as for exports. Coupled with the unequal distribution and unavailability of adequate protein meat in the Highlands/inland lowland areas of PNG, unlike the coastal areas that have access to fish.

The fresh produce sub-sector had not performed well until recently. For example, the value of domestic fresh produce continues to increase but with inadequate reporting on productions in recent years. 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.

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 more recently, the creation of the District Development Authorities (DDA) are the underlying causes of the dysconnectivity that hamper the effective delivery of goods and services to the people, including more accountability and transparency of the public service machinery (National Agriculture Development Plan). 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 for air and sea transport; farmers do not normally 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 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). To address this and related issues, the government's National Land Development Program Phase II (now underway) will focus on developing pathways for effective management of customary lands in the areas of land administration, land dispute resolution and land development. DAL and other Agriculture Agencies (e.g. FPDA, Commodity Institutions) will work closely with the Department of Lands and Physical Planning to come up with appropriate plans to develop customary lands in PNG.

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.

However, 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, lack of investment, establishment of quality infrastructures, measurement, control and food safety standards (such as Codex), etc. are still some ongoing challenges. The government's commitment to introducing the Biosecurity Policy/Bill through NAQIA, Seeds Policy (by FPDA), Customary Land Policy (Lands Dept) and the formulation of the National Quality Policy (by NISIT), for instance, are indicators of progress 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 potentials (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

To mainstream agriculture in the National Education Curriculum beginning at the primary level to secondary and tertiary institutions, including TVETs with a greater focus on food safety, nutrition and healthy diets for children (home economics), entrepreneurship, climate-smart agriculture practices, agronomy and agrobiography will be the immediate priority of the government.

5.3. Innovation, Technology and Scientific Research

Key enablers to transforming our food systems are innovation, technology and scientific research to inform policies and actions critical for food quality, food quantity and food safety.

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 Inclusivity and Partnerships

PNG recognizes the need for a wide range of stakeholder engagement (including vulnerable groups) and forge relevant 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 advance into downstream processing of the agriculture and livestock products.

5.7. Quality and Reliable Infrastructures

To develop a sustainable and appropriate infrastructure system that is resilient to disasters and provides access to mobility of food supply. Infrastructure sector is vital in facilitating growth of agriculture sector as well as supporting the entire food supply chain.

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, SME Policy, National Nutrition Policy 2016 – 2026 and other relevant policies, programmes and strategies.

7. COALITION PARTNERS

The Coalition Partners include all Provincial Governments, 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 (NISIT), 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 and Treasury, Department of Community Development and Religion, National Youth Authority, Dept. of Lands and Physical Planning, Independent Consumer and Competition Commission (ICCC), Department of Works, National Development Bank, Bank of Papua New Guinea (Central Bank), FAO, WFP, WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, DFAT/ACIAR, USAID, EU, 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 and sustain national programs, with the broad aim of addressing setbacks and challenges identified in this National Pathway. PNG will continue to work with our traditional partners such as the appropriate UN Agencies, EU, 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 multiple 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, National Trade Policy, etc.) to ensure they complement the Food Security Policy.
- ii. Reintegrate 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 key 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. Impose higher tariffs on unhealthy imported foods and encourage food fortifications (i.e., through introduction of a separate law) and increase awareness for people to revert to local healthy foods.
- v. Build good road networks and reduce freight costs so local food productions with high standards in quality and food safety are brought to town and city markets.
- vi. PNG to adopt the Committee of World Food Security (CFS) Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition 2021² without delay.

10. THE FUTURE OF FOOD SYSTEMS IN PNG

Fisheries and agriculture (including livestock) remains the primary source of production systems that directly impacts on the socio-economic development and sustainable livelihoods of the rural population and peri-urban communities in PNG. Like the other two primary industry sectors (forestry and fisheries), agriculture is not fully developed and needs timely intervention to increase national production of cash crops and less dependent on imports, hence improve our local and national 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, propagate climate knowledge widely, enhance local supply value chains and greater market accessibility to achieve sustainable livelihoods for our people. PNG needs to have an inclusive, sustainable, healthy and resilient food systems and an informed population.

11. ANNEXURE

DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

Food Systems transformation is a key enabler that will enhance our efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the domestic plans, programs and strategies. It is our desire to reach a healthy, resilient, equitable and sustainable future, where no one is left behind. We therefore remain committed to achieving the following outcomes:-

1. Form a National Food Coalition, consistent with regional and global commitments
2. Establish a Food Fortification Council, to be operated under its own laws
3. Establish a National Food Security and Nutrition body, to be regulated under its own laws
4. Develop a 'National Implementation Strategy' to improve our performance on the respective targets and indicators of the SDGs (for the remaining nine years).
5. Constantly review the relevant laws, policies, programs and strategies of the government with a view to transform our agri-food systems (e.g., customary land mobilization laws)
6. Forge relevant partnerships and coalitions to implement the priority action areas and recommendations contained in the National Pathway Framework to transform food systems in Papua New Guinea

² <http://www.fao.org/cfs/en/>