



The Bahamas National Pathway for Food Systems Transformation in support of The 2030 Agenda

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Achieving sustainable and equitable food systems is crucial for the socio-economic development of a country. In response to global trends, The Bahamas has undergone economic, demographic, technological and cultural changes that have had a profound impact not only on food choices but also on the way in which they are produced, processed, sold, distributed, and consumed. A sustainable food system constitutes a specific chain of activities from protection of natural resources and biodiversity to production and consumption through transformation and distribution taking into consideration environmental, economic and social dimensions. The Bahamian food system face various extremes of challenges such as limited arable land and freshwater resources; harsh climate change impacts; incapacity to access seeds and other germplasm for crop and livestock production, as well as aquaculture; post-harvest losses; inadequate food processing and safety regulations; inefficient food transport and market access; lack of new entrants into the industry; unhealthy consumption habits; unsustainable agricultural practices; limited availability of adapted genetic resources; low resilience to adverse weather; lack of agricultural services and extensions support; inadequate government legislations and policies; as well as limited knowledge of ecosystems and its functions as the foundation of the food system.

The Current Bahamian Food System

The country's food systems depend largely on international trade and consist of an extensive list of food and agricultural products to sustain its value chains. The Bahamas imports more than 90% of the country's food needs. In recent years, the agri-food balance deficit has increased (B\$ 548 million in 2014 to B\$ 609 million in 2018), driven by increased imports of agri-food products (from B\$ 620 million to B\$ 693 million, or 23.1% of the country's trade balance deficit in 2018). While imports of animal products have tended to be stable since 2015, vegetable imports have increased to B\$ 136 million in 2019. The country's balance of food goods and other agricultural and fisheries products showed a deficit of B\$ 537.3 million in 2019¹. The high rate of food imports create a perceived notion that The Bahamas is food secure, in terms of access to food. However, foods imported are mostly processed and high in salt, trans fats and sugar, resulting increasingly in obesity and non-communicable diseases. Thus, food and nutritional security issues in the country are largely related to the capacity of people obtaining access to, and consuming, diverse nutritious foods that are needed for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Dependency on food imports continues to increase as The Bahamas' agricultural output has experienced a steady decline, reaching B\$ 23 million in 2018 down from B\$ 30.6 million in 2012. The national food production only supplies 8.8% of the national market needs as recorded in 2019. The main cultivated crops and livestock reflect a pronounced loss in productivity, mainly due to lack of technological applications.

In comparison, agri-food exports generated B\$ 82.3 million in 2019, but they are highly concentrated on unsustainable fisheries products, and more specifically on a few products (96.8% - fish, coral, mollusks and salt), but mainly crawfish. Agricultural exports totaled B\$ 0.8 million in 2017, and dropped to B\$ 0.42 million in 2018, and 0.34 million in 2019. Export-oriented agricultural crops that have existed in the past (mainly citrus, papaya, and cucumbers) have been destroyed by exotic pest infestations (citrus canker) and hurricanes, or pushed out of the export market due to price competition (i.e. locally grown hydroponic cucumbers).

¹ For more details see: "Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources Blue and Green Sectoral Strategy and Action Plan: Appendix 1 - Current Situation Analysis", Carlos Puig, May 2021.

Building a Sustainable Food System through the SDGs

When evaluating the food system, consideration is placed on the entire range of actors and their activities involved in aspects of food production, aggregation, transport, processing, distribution, consumption of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry and fisheries, including the inputs used and management of the waste generated by each of the activities. The core actors and activities of food systems are intimately interconnected with non-food agriculture production systems and are influenced by interlinked social, political, cultural, technological, economic and environmental drivers (as well as their proximate environment). The whole system therefore involves a variety of private, public and civil society actors while requiring cross-scale governance².

Incorporating an equitability perspective, sustainable food systems are expected to contribute to four core goals: 1) Food security, Nutrition and Health; 2) Socio-economic Development; 3) Governance and territory; and the preservation and management of the 4) Environment. A sustainable food system is one that achieves these four core goals in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases are not compromised. While withstanding shocks (e.g climatic events and health pandemics) a sustainable food system is expected to continue to function and deliver, even in an increasingly challenging context. The Bahamas' National Pathway towards a sustainable food system will be guided for the attainment of these goals.

In addition food systems are directly related to the attainment of more than 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), improving their sustainability, resilience and inclusiveness is seen as one of the most important levers for the achievement of these goals. In 2014, The Bahamas began the process of developing a 25-year National Development Plan: Vision 2040³. Recognizing the synergies between the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government of The Bahamas ensured that the 2030 Agenda was localised into its national development planning process thereby providing a roadmap for the implementation of the SDGs. In this case, sustainable development is a well-established concept of reference for the long-term development perspective of The Bahamas. This has been eloquently illustrated in The Bahamas' 2018 Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable

²https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/food_system_analysis_rapid_methodology-english_18_may_2020.pdf

³https://www.vision2040bahamas.org/media/uploads/Draft__National_Development_Plan_01.12.2016_for_public_release.pdf

Development Goals⁴ which supports sustainable development through economic diversification in the Blue and Green Economies.

Enabling a Sustainable Bahamian Food System

Agriculture and fisheries play a major role in creating wealth and promoting sustainable development in the Bahamian economy. Their direct value added represents only a very small part of the country's GDP (at the level of production itself), and their contribution has tended to decrease in recent years, moving from 1.2% in 2012 to 0.7% in 2019, but these are resource-based activities that have very significant indirect and induced effects in the generation of national wealth.

For a large archipelagic country like The Bahamas, agriculture and fisheries bring far-reaching socio-economic benefits in terms of the occupation and sustainable development of the territory – they are at the heart of natural resource exploitation. This is an issue that raises unique challenges, due in particular to the territorial dispersion and large number of “family islands”, as well as climate change and the increased pressure exerted by real estate development on the environment.

In this context, the agricultural policy of The Bahamas is deeply integrated in the country’s economic policy, as the government is trying to reverse the economic slowdown. The Government of The Bahamas is preparing the development of an action plan to support the agriculture and fisheries sectors through a combination of value chain development measures, technology adoption, research and extension services, food and safety protection, and environmental sustainability embodied in a strategic plan.

With the support of international institutions, like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a series of analyses, studies, and strategies were conducted to find the best way to revitalize the sector and to regain competitiveness of the food system. The attainment of this transformation objective relies on increasing overall agricultural production and productivity, and increasing value added across the market chain. In the process, it was concluded that in order to accelerate competitiveness, the food system must be supported by an enabling environment consisting of effective policy and legislation, as well as

⁴https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19874VNR_document_03.07.18_master_document.pdf

strengthening the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources' (as the lead government ministerial stakeholder) capacity to deliver essential services to agri-food value chains.

The Bahamas' National Pathway to a Sustainable Food System

As mentioned above there is untapped potential for agri-food import substitution and exports within the agriculture and fisheries sector. Likewise, the current COVID-19 global pandemic situation has highlighted that the main existing weaknesses in the food system is the governmental support as an ecosystem that provides public services to customers and business users on the supply and demand side of the food value chain. This situation has been amplified by the natural characteristics of the archipelago and by the ministerial ecosystem's existing inefficiencies⁵, mainly related to cross-cutting themes that were not appropriately addressed prior to the pandemic, essentially, the imperative need for the modernisation of public services through digitization⁶ and professionalization⁷, to facilitate improved intergovernmental collaboration and private sector competitiveness. The modernization of the MAMR will significantly improve customer service efficiency and would favor the data compilation necessary for the decision making of both public and private sector policies; provide transparency in all the food system processes; and improve production planning, access to markets, as well as technology democratization.

In order to effectively and efficiently transform the Bahamian food system to meet the expectations of Agenda 2030, the MAMR will adopt an innovative systems approach in the market value chains and implement a results-based planning and budgeting system. For this reason, the Ministry has developed a five-year strategic plan (2022-2026)⁸ that aims to facilitate small business development and entrepreneurship in the agricultural and fisheries sectors. Its strategic orientation is guided by the five focus areas below:

- 1 **Food Import Substitution** - aim to take advantage of the national market by implementing an import substitution strategy and by linking producers to the tourism industry's supply chain.⁹

⁵ For more details see: Support for Economic Diversification in The Bahamas, Diagnostic and Prioritization of Sectors for Boutique Agriculture, "Strategy and Action Plan" Carlos Puig, IDB. March 2019.

⁶ With the objective of improving the public service's efficiency, providing transparency, improving production/technology support, data facilitation, and better coordination among government agencies to improve collaboration through the use of technology.

⁷ Administrative capacities: delivery, coordination, regulatory and analytical capacities.

⁸ For more details see: "Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources Blue and Green Sectoral Strategy and Action Plan", Carlos Puig, May 2021.

⁹ For more details: "Bahamas Agricultural Investment Sector Profile and Sector Targeting Strategy", IDB, Carlos Puig, December 2019.

- 2 **Export Market Development**¹⁰ - through building the capacities of producers to meet global standards.
- 3 Support for the **Blue and Green Economy** - as a long-term, sustainable development perspective of The Bahamas.
- 4 **Improvement of Public Services** through digitization and professionalization¹¹ to strengthen institutional capacities; improve intergovernmental collaboration; and provide efficient customer service to the private sector
- 5 **Facilitation of Agricultural Finance and Investment** - to support the private agri-food sector development; focusing on enterprises that will provide innovative processes, technology transfer, and linkages with national value chains. Public financial support to the private sector, through a sector targeting investment policy, will focus mainly on young entrepreneurs and farmers/fishers, as well as the introduction and adoption of new technologies and smart farming/blue & green economy applications that contribute to productivity improvement and sector competitiveness.

Feedback from the country's national Dialogues suggests that the immediate overarching gaps to be addressed in the Bahamas' food system is linked to the need for facilitated intergovernmental collaboration; development of a centralized technological database to support extension services, the need to democratize knowledge across the food value chains and the shortage of private sector financial tools adapted to the sector. To create a paradigm shift in the Bahamian food system, a transversal approach to developing the Bahamas' Blue and Green Economies should be taken. This will require levers of change such as innovation, finance, and youth empowerment to be supported by data, policies, and governance.

The Bahamas has prioritized three main action lines to facilitate the transformation of the food systems, they are:

1. Improvement of the public sector's systemic competitiveness (*Action Track 5*)
 - a. MAMR Online Single-User Platform
 - b. Revised Extensions Unit
2. Promote and facilitate private sector investments (*Action Track 4*)

¹⁰ For more details: "*Boutique Agriculture Strategy and Action Plan*", IDB, Carlos Puig, March 2019.

¹¹ Administrative capacities: delivery, coordination, and regulatory and analytical capacities.

- a. Promote public-private partnerships (PPP) to remodel agricultural interventions
 - b. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) lead generation strategy
3. Facilitate agribusiness financing to the sector (*Action Track 5*)
 - a. Agribusiness Guarantee Loans (AGL)
 - b. Agribusiness Matching Grant Program
 - c. Entrepreneurial Technical Assistance Program

To first implement this strategic approach there is a need to reinforce the administrative capacities of the food systems' governance ecosystem in terms of specific training to strengthen the delivery, coordination, regulatory and analytical capacities in all the ministerial departments and autonomous bodies. Digitization and professionalization of public services with the appropriate incentives is paramount to support programs for agri-food sector development, thus requiring commitment to action by all stakeholders across disciplines.

There is also the need for private sector financial facilitation and both domestic and foreign direct investment promotion to push the Blue and Green Sectoral Strategy¹². Focusing on enterprises in the agri-food sector that will provide innovative processes, technology transfer, and linkages with national value chains.

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Through quantifying the objectives of the Blue and Green Strategy and sizing of the support for financing investments in new technologies that can capture the country's potential food import substitution and export markets, target indicators will be established to identify expected outcomes over the medium term of five (5) years and the long term of ten (10) years to reflect the ambitious vision of transformation of the Bahamian food system.

¹² For more details see: "Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources Blue and Green Sectoral Strategy and Action Plan", Carlos Puig, May 2021.

Transformation through Partnerships

Intergovernmental collaboration will be significant in implementing this strategy across various ministerial departments. Key roles will be supported by agencies such as the Bahamas Agricultural Health Food Safety Authority (BAHFSA); Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) for research; Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation (BAIC) for agribusiness development; Bahamas Investment Authority (BIA); University of The Bahamas and other universities, local NGOs and producer groups. With continued support from international institutions, like IDB, the FAO, IICA and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) further strengthening of rural agricultural economies can be provided and action lines achieved. Through technical assistance from current stakeholders and partnering on new initiatives and projects the Bahamian food system can increase its resiliency to the impacts of climate change. In particular is the recent decision to participate in the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate Initiative (AIM4C). The goal of this initiative is to increase and accelerate innovation research and development on agriculture and food systems in support of climate action. It is undoubtedly known that through the co-creation of knowledge existing approaches can be enhanced to deliver new ways to sustainably increase agricultural productivity, improve livelihoods, conserve nature and biodiversity, and adapt and build resilience to climate change, all while enabling science-based and data-driven decision and policy making for climate smart food systems.

As mentioned above, The Bahamas' 2018 Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals¹³ (interlinked with the National Development Plan: Vision 2040¹⁴) supports sustainable development through economic diversification in the Blue and Green Economies. Following the onset of the COVID-19 health pandemic, the Government of The Bahamas enlisted key stakeholders throughout the public and private sector to devise an Economic Recovery Report¹⁵ to serve as the guiding foundation for the economic vision of the government: an economy that is resilient, dynamic, inclusive and sustainable. As it relates to the food system, this report is in alignment with the Blue and Green Sectoral Strategy. Collectively, these national planning documents reinforce the immediate and long-term need to support the country's

¹³https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19874VNR_document_03.07.18_master_document.pdf

¹⁴https://www.vision2040bahamas.org/media/uploads/Draft__National_Development_Plan_01.12.2016_for_public_release.pdf

¹⁵ <https://opm.gov.bs/economic-recovery-committee-executive-summary-report-2020/>

sustainable development thereby fostering action for sustainable food systems.

The state of the Bahamian food system is known, strategies to overcome challenges have been developed, key stakeholders are engaged, and the pathway to a sustainable food system is established. The Bahamas is committed to transforming its food system to become resilient and sustainable for its future generations.

Forward Upward Onward Together