



# GUYANA'S NATIONAL PATHWAY FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

IN PREPARATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS FOOD SYSTEMS  
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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

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## 1 Background

Food systems “encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.” (FAO, 2018). They seek to ensure that all people have access to safe and nutritious food.

Sustainable food systems are not just limited to ending hunger, but they can help Guyana achieve critical progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable food systems can contribute to the fight against poverty by creating good jobs, improving access to food, and supporting healthy communities. Further, rebuilding our food systems to make them more sustainable, productive and resilient is essential for solving long-term hunger challenges and managing acute shocks, like disease outbreaks and climate extremes.

In September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres will convene a Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The Summit aims to bring the world awareness to the fact that we all must work collectively to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food. It is a summit for everyone everywhere – a people’s summit. It is also a solutions summit that will require everyone to take action to transform the world’s food systems.

The summit will be an important platform for Guyana to reassure the world that the nation is actively doing its part in helping the world to evolve its food systems.

The Summit is aimed at producing the four (4) key results, as presented in Figure 1 within five (5) Action Tracks, namely:

- Action Track 1: Ensure Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for All
- Action Track 2: Shift to Healthy and Sustainable Consumption Patterns
- Action Track 3: Boost Nature-Positive Food Production at Scale
- Action Track 4: Advance Equitable Livelihoods and Value Distribution
- Action Track 5: Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses

### 1.2 Context

The objectives and ideas of the food systems summit are very similar to the strategies that Guyana would’ve previously embarked on. The Jagdeo initiative was one such strategy, which aimed to remove the constraints that hindered the development of agriculture in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Further, the

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<sup>1</sup> Private Sector Commission: The Jagdeo Initiative Technical Information Bulletin No. 8 October 2007, [https://caricom.org/documents/9841-jagdeo\\_initiative.pdf](https://caricom.org/documents/9841-jagdeo_initiative.pdf), (accessed 14 July 2021).

Guyana Food and Nutrition Security Strategy of 2011 was a plan of action directed at improving the food situation of the country and its people.

Despite being a net exporter of food, Guyana still faces some elements of food and nutrition insecurity, especially given that the definition of food security is not limited to the availability of food, but also includes access to food and quality of nutrition. In Guyana, the food security challenge involves creating income-earning opportunities and making enough safe and nutritious food available for all residents. Rising food prices, increased weather variability and the global economic crisis have, in recent years, made the goal of enhancing food security in Guyana even more challenging.<sup>2</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic was an eye-opening experience for Guyana, as it demonstrated that our food system and supply chains are fragile and susceptible to shocks. Disruptions in the food supply chains especially in the high value commodities such as fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, and milk affected farming and food processing activities. The most affected farmers included casual/seasonal workers, women-headed households, those located far from the markets, small crop farmers, small ruminant keepers, and small-scale/artisanal fishers.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, Guyana is now challenged with the task of creating a food system which is resilient and has the capacity to easily absorb shocks in an effort to reduce the impacts of food unavailability and limited food access.

### **1.3 The Foundation for Food Systems Transformation in Guyana**

Guyana has a well-established foundation, in several of the existing strategies and policies, that will aid the transformation of the food system as more actionable solutions are undertaken with more urgency than in the past.

The country has made significant strides from its effort to promote a robust food system for the country, despite the challenges. In 2009 through a market led approach, Guyana embarked on a grow more food campaign which yielded great success in encouraging small holders to increase production, especially the production of other crops. As a result of the campaign, exports of other crops increased by 32.4% in the year 2009.<sup>4</sup>

Guyana's Low-Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) was launched in 2009 setting out a vision for balancing national development with global climate action and the preservation of biodiversity. For 2021 to 2030 the LCDS which is currently being updated will aim to build climate resilience

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<sup>2</sup> Food and Nutrition Security Strategy for Guyana April 2011, <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/guy166205.pdf>, (accessed 14 July 2021).

<sup>3</sup> CARICOM-FAO Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts on Food Security, Agricultural Production and Livelihoods, 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://guyanachronicle.com/2010/10/23/grow-more-campaign-boosts-guyanas-food-security/>

in the agricultural sector by managing drought and flood risk, developing climate proof sustainable farm systems and building the adaptive capacity of the sector.

Further, in 2011 the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy for Guyana was unveiled. The strategy is a feasible plan that is directed at improving the food situation of the country and its people, especially for the vulnerable populations facing food insecurity. This was an important step in ensuring that Guyana takes a strategic approach in improving its food system.

Presently, to shape the course of agricultural and food systems transformation in Guyana, the following action pillars are priorities that are set out in the Agriculture Development Strategy 2021-2025:

1. Diversify agriculture production and improve land access in an effort to increase its competitiveness to provide real economic benefits to the rural sector in an oil-based economy.
2. Create a robust marketing system to improve local and international market access.
3. Promote a national integrated approach to Food and Nutrition Security as fundamental for improving social welfare by ensuring access to safe and nutritious food. [particularly in a COVID-19 environment]
4. Strengthen the resilience and sustainability of agrifood systems to promote effective management of natural and productive resources, and to protect the investment and livelihoods in agriculture from external shocks
5. Modernize and upgrade supporting infrastructure to advance water management and transportation requirements
6. Strengthen and modernize support services to promote innovation and sustainability of the agriculture sector.
7. Develop Human resources on which to build a responsive, diversified, gender-responsive, world-class agriculture workforce which can deliver the vision
8. Improve multi-sectoral coordination and strengthen data systems to guide policy development and implementation.

Moreover, it must be noted that Guyana holds lead responsibility for Agriculture, Agricultural Diversification and Food Security in the CARICOM Quasi-Cabinet, and President H.E. Irfaan Ali earlier this year presented to his colleague Heads of Government, a Food Production and Food Security Agenda which outlines in detail a strategy and action plan for transforming the agriculture sector in CARICOM. Guyana and all CARICOM member states have since signed on to this strategy and work is on the way for several of the necessary actions to be implemented to ensure transformation in the immediate, medium and long term. During his address to the CARICOM Regional Food Systems Dialogue, His Excellency Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana noted that the following key priority areas must be addressed to drive the transformation of the agri-food system. These areas include, but are not limited to:

- The complete removal of all technical barriers to trade,
- The implementation of an E-agriculture strategy,
- Investments in production, research and development,

- Measures to promote de-risking of the sector; and
- The improvement of transport and logistics.

Change in the aforementioned areas will allow Guyana’s national food systems to meet the defined expectations by 2030.

## 2. Guyana’s Position on Food Systems Transformation

Guyana held its National High-Level Dialogue on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2021 which saw a wide range of stakeholders lending their voices to the discussion on how food systems transformation can be achieved in Guyana. The Dialogue consisted of representatives of development partners, private sector, farmers, investors, agencies in the agricultural sector, technical experts, and government ministries, agro-processors, NGOs, civil society, and many others who highlighted some of the common challenges in the food system. These include:

- High cost of planting materials and farm inputs
- Limited and unreliable markets and market linkages
- Underdeveloped agro-processing
- Inadequate Drainage and irrigation
- Lack of agriculture product diversification
- Lack of systems to deal with food waste and loss
- Low quality standards in meat production
- Some households lack the minimum financial resources needed to access sufficient high-quality food
- Lack of integrated value chain development programmes to assist farmers and local agri-enterprises to access high value chains
- Small and medium-sized companies (SME’s) are unable to access financing readily

### **Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Agriculture Plan 2021-2025 as a pathway to achieving SDG 2**

With just 10 years remaining to achieve 2030 Agenda, Guyana is not yet convincingly able to meet the targets set out in SDG 2. To do this we must simultaneously focus on growth and sustainable development. It is noted that current modes of production and consumption threaten the achievement of Goal 2 – Zero Hunger.

During the *Guyana Voluntary National Review* of 2019, the following were identified as important considerations to advance national development:

- adequate and predictable financing, key investments in infrastructure and service delivery
- efforts to promote more sustainable agriculture – diversify from rice and sugar, especially with agriculture exports. In tandem with value chain development, supply chain management, quality standards,
- sustained farmer population considering aging farmers and limited interest among youths in agriculture
- promote research and development and adequate data systems
- multi-sectoral coordination and leveraging partnerships with private sector and international entities for sustainability

- Lack of social safeguards, legislation and governance mechanisms that allow indigenous and local communities to secure their rights access to land, water and genetic resources
- Lack of a disaster preparedness and recovery framework

The following highlights Guyana’s main areas of priority and aligns with the three thematic areas which was discussed during the CARICOM Regional Dialogue.

### **A. Thematic Area #1: Food Security**

Drawing from Guyana's 2011 Food and Nutrition Security Strategy for Guyana, we can begin to layout the foundation on which Guyana's newly envisioned plan for food security can be built. Guyana has great potential to be the breadbasket of the Caribbean due to the country's large land mass of 214,969 km<sup>2</sup> and substantial amount of arable land, ideal for agricultural production.

In Guyana, agriculture is mostly concentrated along the coastal region which is roughly 1.0 m below sea level at high tide. This creates a situation where farming is very susceptible to flooding and its devastating after effects, this was all too evident in May of 2021, when the country recorded one of its wettest May since 2004.

The agriculture sector in Guyana consistently sees growth year over year, with rice currently leading the way as the main export earner, followed by sugar and coconut. However, upon closer examination of Guyana's agriculture sector, it would be observed that the sector is still vulnerable to factors such as flooding, market demand and volatile supply chains.

Therefore, when it comes to the strengthening of Guyana’s food security, it is important to bring light to the important areas of relevance, the challenges faced, and the country’s current position on those areas, these include:

#### **I. Food Availability**

Guyana’s abundance of natural resources and large swaths of agricultural land usually means that food availability is not generally considered a major challenge. If consideration is

### **Expectation for Guyana’s Food Systems in the coming decade**

“By adopting a “food systems approach” rather than an individual sector approach, we can be more productive, more inclusive of the poor, more environmentally sustainable and resilient, and better equipped to deliver healthy and nutritious diets to all Guyanese.

Transforming Guyana’s food system will provide an environment where:

- agriculture can continue to provide a good livelihood for many (not just farmers);
- the country can take advantage of emerging trade opportunities in agriculture both regionally and internationally;
- the country can meet its development goals by leaving no one behind; and
- EVERYONE can have healthy, affordable diets that promote good health and reduce non-communicable diseases.”

*Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, Minister of Agriculture and Guyana’s National Convener for the UN Food Systems Summit*

given to the six (Caribbean) food groups: staples, foods from animals, legumes, vegetables, fruits and fats and oils—one can conclude that Guyana is self-sufficient in the production of foods from each of these food groups.<sup>5</sup>

Rice, sugar, and fisheries are considered the traditional agricultural sub-sectors. These sub-sectors produce significantly more than is demanded domestically and thus supply their products to export markets. However, the non-traditional agricultural sub-sector which is also critically important, especially in terms of diet diversification and enabling poorer and smaller producers to provide for their families, lacks the same level of availability, especially in hinterland areas.

It is in this regard, that greater emphasis must be placed on increased production in the non-traditional sector, in an effort to increase the availability of fruits, vegetables and root crops. Which are all required for balance and diversified diet.

## II. Food access

The main demographic affected by food insecurity are small scale independent artisans (small fishermen, small-scale miners); small holders (small scale farmers); marginal populations in urban areas; and Indigenous Guyanese situated in the Hinterlands. Persons within this demographic are characterized by their inability to access a balanced and nutritious diet, due their limited income or lack thereof and the lack of family support and social services. Further, the high prevalence of poverty and food insecurity in Hinterland areas are primarily responsible for limited food diversity and access to food which is of good nutritional value.

## III. Food utilization

The food consumption patterns of the Guyanese populace have been shifted over the last decade, due to the influence of the western world. Many have shifted away from traditional and culturally based foods to the convenience of fast food and the low cost of processed foods, which is most times imported. This change in consumption pattern has impacted the rates of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes within the population. It is estimated that the annual direct costs of treating diabetes and/or hypertension in Guyana are estimated to be between US\$7.2 million and US\$10.8 million.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it is acknowledged that there needs to be a focus on encouraging consumers to consume healthier diets. This may be achieved through the development of effective pricing policies which seek to curb the demand for foods high in saturated fat, trans fats, sugar or salt, thereby prompting persons to consume more fruits and vegetables.

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<sup>5</sup> Food and Nutrition Security Strategy for Guyana April 2011, <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/guy166205.pdf>, (accessed 14 July 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Health, GUYANA Strategic Plan: NCD Prevention and Control 2013 – 2020, <https://www.paho.org/guy/dmdocuments/Guyana%20NCDs%20Strategic%20Plan%202013-2020%20.pdf>, (accessed 13 July 2021).



#### IV. Food Stability

One of the greatest threats to the stability of Guyana's food system is climate change. Climate variability has made it difficult to maintain steady production throughout the year, due to severe flooding which affects the majority of farmers along the coastland of Guyana. For instance, Guyana's rainy season for 2021 resulted in wide scale flooding which severely disrupted the livelihoods of both small and large scale producers. As a consequence, the availability of fresh produce was impacted, this was also followed by a sharp increase in prices.

#### **B. Thematic Area #2: Climate Resilience**

Guyana, and in particular the coastal zone, is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. Annual mean temperature and precipitation are increasing which leads to unpredictable floods and drought periods; which are expected to worsen in the upcoming decades. In light of Guyana's vulnerability, the Government of Guyana is fully aware of the increasing climate-related threats and are committed to the transformation to a low-carbon economy, and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable ecosystems as well as local rural, and indigenous communities to combat the effects of Climate Change.

Speakers at the Guyana National High-Level Dialogue highlighted many of the fragilities of the agrifood systems caused by the disruptions of the COVID-19 crises. The COVID 19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of food production and distribution systems especially to the most vulnerable and to rural populations and has exacerbated other challenges such as the threat of Climate Change. Guyana must confront these risks which threaten the livelihood of farmers and fishers by transforming its food systems to be more climate resilient.

In addition, Guyana recognizes the importance of maintaining and increasing the genetic diversity of crops and livestock within the country. It is urgent that both marine and terrestrial ecosystems are safeguarded from imminent threats to enhance climate resilience and provide safe, healthy and nutritious diets for all.

Practical suggestions to give force to the commitments that emerged from the Guyana National High-Level Dialogue are as follows:

- Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress to address the challenges that threaten a sustainable food system. Guyana must put measures in place to promote de-risking of the agriculture sector to withstand any risks that threatens the sustainability and productivity of the agriculture sector. 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.
- Ensuring national food systems are regenerative and circular to build resilient food systems. 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.

- Develop Climate Smart Practices that farmers should implement to help deal with the adverse effects of Climate Change. As a pathway towards agricultural development and food security, Climate Smart Practices should revolve around three (3) main pillars; reducing and removing greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere, increasing productivity and incomes and enhancing resilience of livelihoods.
- Increased investments in disaster preparedness with a 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). In Guyana, an increase in investments can help foster the development of resilience to vulnerabilities in food systems. Investments can also provide training to farmers to improve their farming practices to enhance their resilience.

### **C. Thematic Area #3: Funding and Financing**

Guyana has long recognized the benefits of transforming its current food systems to be more sustainable. From ending poverty and hunger to responding to climate change and sustaining natural resources, transformed food systems lie at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Guyana has always advocated the need for fair access to adequate financing to develop food value chains and create sustainable food systems. Transforming the food system will require significantly greater public financing as well as private capital from national, regional and international partners.

A challenge for small and medium-sized companies (SME's) is barriers in accessing financing and existing financing options do not necessarily incentivize them to sustainably produce nutritious foods. Inadequate financing also limits farmers and fishers from building resilience against natural disasters. Some households are even disadvantaged as they lack the minimum financing needed to access sufficient high-quality foods.

Guyana realizes that increasing investments in a more sustainable food system will require changes in policy and public and private sector support to encourage investments in national food production which plays an important role in supporting rural transformation and mitigating risks.

Suggestions to achieve these elements that emerged from the Guyana National High-Level Dialogue include:

- 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).
- Implementing mechanisms that provide equitable access to financial resources for investment along the value chain for women and youth.

- Provide blended finance solutions and concessional loans or subsidies (e.g. as part of public-private partnerships) to help develop the sustainable domestic food value chains. 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.
- Scale up protection programs by to enhancing their financing, expanding their reach, improving delivery and making systems more adaptive to crises.
- Committing a targeted allocation of public spending towards agri-investment.

### **3. Nexus in achieving Food Systems Transformation**

Achieving Guyana's Food Systems Transformation is reliant on in the successful implementation of Guyana's Agriculture Strategy 2021-2025 and the Strategy for Advancing the CARICOM Agri-Food Systems Agenda as both of these strategies have key targets to achieve over the next 5 -10 years that will strengthen our food system.