



Food Systems Pathway Commitment and Position Statement

Overview

Timor-Leste is an agrarian country with a population of 1.3 million people, of which 71 percent live in rural areas, and the majority depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Much effort has been made in the last decade to improve livelihoods, economic growth, and food security, evidenced by the development and implementation of a range of agricultural related activities and policies. The Government has instituted a number of key activities including importing, trialling and distributing high yield seed varieties, distributing agricultural machinery and fishing materials, initiating livestock vaccination and surveillance of transboundary animal disease schemes, establishing associations for crop production, rehabilitating and expanding coffee and other high value industrial crops, introducing free tiling, institutionalising rice bags subsidies and constructing and rehabilitating irrigation schemes. As a result, rice productivity, a key staple crop, has doubled in the last five years.

However, significant challenges remain, with Timor-Leste still experiencing some of the highest rates of undernutrition in the world with 47 percent of children under-five years being stunted, and 8.6 percent suffering from acute malnutrition. Twenty three percent of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) are anaemic and at the same time, overweight and obesity has risen threefold since 2003 to 19% indicating early signs of the country facing the triple burden of malnutrition.

Made worse by the COVID-19 Pandemic and recent flooding, half the population suffers from some form of food insecurity, and it's estimated that only 15 to 37 percent of the households can afford a nutritious diet. Diet quality is poor with 65 percent of women of reproductive age meeting minimum dietary diversity, and only 14 % of children under 5 years meeting the requirements of a minimum acceptable diet. These challenges are compounded by significant levels of poverty (46%), vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change affecting productivity, water supply and biodiversity.

To address some of these challenges, the Government has recently launched a Consolidated National Action Plan for Nutrition and Food Security (SDG2 CNAP-NFS). The Plan presents a cross sector common results framework, prioritising high impact interventions to reduce malnutrition and food insecurity and achieve the countries SDG2 targets. The SDG CNAP-NFS is aligned with key Government policy frameworks (including Strategic Development Plan (2011-2030), the National Health Sector Strategic Plan II (2011-2030) the Zero Hunger Action Plan for a Hunger and Malnutrition Free Timor-Leste 2025 (PAN-HAM-TIL) and the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2017), all of which advocate for improvements in food security and nutrition being central to the Government's development agenda.

Supporting the execution of CNAP is the Comoro Declaration signed in 2010 by all relevant ministries to end hunger and malnutrition and Timor's membership to the Scaling up Nutrition Movement (2020) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (2018)

Following several sub-national and a national dialogue involving various Government ministries, the private sector, farmer organisations, women groups, youth groups, the media, and civil society, this position paper provides the pathway for the transformation of our food system. It outlines the aspirations, vision, and Government commitment to ensure a resilient national food system by 2030. On this journey, the Government calls for coordinated action and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders to work together and achieve the targets.

Vision

By 2030 Timor-Leste will be self-sufficient in food production, be able to promote nutritious diversified local food consumption and have a resilient and sustainable food value chain.

The interventions needed to attain this vision will be the responsibility of all key sectors including health, agriculture and fisheries, social protection, education, youth, tourism, trade, public works and equality and inclusion.

Challenges

The food system dialogues have unearthed key local challenges related to the five central food systems frameworks of production; transport and warehousing; processing; food distribution; and consumption.

Production and productivity remain low due to lack of markets, conflicting cross-sectoral policies, capacity challenges, climate change, dependence on rain, lack of mechanisation, limited access to tools promoting production (especially for women) and limited participation of youth who are a key labour force. Voices from the dialogues indicated that issues associated with food production in Timor-Leste are not merely technical but also social, environmental, and economic including water quantity, quality and stability, a dwindling labour force and limited financial investment from the private sector to add value to farm products.

Poor road networks and infrastructure combined with unsuitable transportation and low-quality storage facilities continue to contribute to post-harvest losses, hindering marketing and food safety. Limited food testing, un-standardised labelling, liquidity constraints, and general financial support are impeding the quality and expansion of locally processed products within the food systems and the value chain.

In addition, the high cost of achieving an adequate diverse diet, dependence on imported foods, lack of enforced quality food standards and food taboos all impact consumption patterns and achieving a healthy diet.

As a result of relatively weak public-private partnerships the adoption of digitalisation is very low among producers, processors, and others within the value chain, mainly due to lack of specific public policies, poor connectivity, and low capacity.

At the policy level, Timor-Leste has pursued policies based on the premise of agricultural modernization skewed toward rice production. Limited considerations are given to other crops and the local context (including farming practices and knowledge), which is impeding the development of context specific programs to improve food security.

Game Changing Solutions

Timor-Leste needs to address these challenges effectively and sustainably to transform its food systems to benefit the population across all demographics groups. Investment is required across the elements of the food system to improve the linkages from food production to processing and marketing and ensuring quality and affordable nutritious food is available to all

Production

In the near future , Government will ensure greater investments in activities to diversify local agricultural production including horticultural, livestock, fisheries, coffee and industrial crops. This will be achieved through maximising the utilization of existing irrigation schemes, building the capacity of farmers' groups and constructing a check-dam to ensure water availability for all agricultural activities. At the same time, the Government will aggressively invest in scaling up the implementation of other improved crop management technologies and practices, including conservation agriculture sloping land technology, agro-forestry, improved seeds and community-based seed multiplication, intercropping of leguminous crops, seed storage and seed banks, systems of rice intensification, water harvesting and integrating nutrition valuable crops in the farming system (e.g. pulses and millets). In addition, Government will focus on promoting improved homestead food production including small livestock to ensure healthy diverse diets are available at the household level.

Investment in the fisheries sub-sector will include construction of fishing ports and strengthening aquaculture development, including strengthening regional and bilateral cooperation's to tackle illegal unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

At the same time, Government will establish a "land lease mechanism" allowing potential farmers access to farming land. This will be supported by an integrated national land use plan to minimise loss of productive land to other programs.

Efforts will also be made to sustainably manage tractors and other agricultural machinery to increase agriculture productivity and production. To enable this Government will immediately embark on an exercise to map and catalogue existing public and private agricultural machines to ascertain current coverage and conditions and strengthen regional maintenance centres and hiring services. The private sector will be involved to ensure mechanisation is sustainable and production costs are minimised.

Transport and warehousing

Despite progress, with rudimentary agri-food value chains, post-harvest losses remain significant, accounting for about 20 to 35 percent across all agriculture products. Private sector agri-food processors, wholesalers and retailers report that locally produced products including maize, rice, soya beans are too expensive to purchase given high labour costs and low yields.

While strengthening existing associations and cooperatives to promote private sector involvement the Government will invest more in transportation and warehousing to reduce waste and improve product quality and food safety. In addition, capacity building will be provided to value chain actors including the provision of information on market systems, secure packaging, storage, transportation methods, quality control, food safety and environmentally safe waste management practices.

Maintenance of existing and/or construction of new warehouses at strategic locations is essential, and efforts will be made to introduce new storage facilities, including seed storage, and locally manufactured storage systems which allow easy access and for all (especially women).

To facilitate food transportation from one region to another, access roads between collection points, processing centres and markets will be further developed.

Processing

With the objective of facilitating production, processing, and retailing, Government is establishing and strengthening farmers' associations. However, private sector involvement in input supply, trading, agro-processing, and marketing activities to facilitate productivity, value-addition and income production has been limited. Greater involvement of the private sector will provide an opportunity for increased digitization of the food system, creating new opportunities for farmers within the value chain.

Measures such as improving existing or establishing basic infrastructure, including agri-food collection and semi-processing centres will be priorities. This will include the establishment of processing and packaging centres to provide added product value, generate additional income for farmers and ensure supply stability to markets.

In addition, mechanisms will be put in place to stimulate private sector involvement in the management of food processing facilities; improving technologies for processing and packaging; establishing cold chain storage facilities to control quality and reduce food waste; and focusing processing on foods that can improve infant and young child feeding practices.

The Government will support private sector initiatives to establish facilities that enhance the processing and packaging of perishable products using integrated cold chain management. To support this, investments will be made in capacity building of workers to effectively manage processing requirements.

The processing component of the food systems framework will benefit from access to financial capital through the provision of credit and attractive interest rates established via public-private partnerships. This arrangement will facilitate import-substitution initiatives for locally processed products. Under this initiative capacity building and supporting the provision of appropriate marketing platforms for rural women, youth, and people with disabilities will be a priority.

As a member of the CODEX Alimentarius Commission, the country will embark on implementing the codes associated with maintaining food commodity standards to protect the health of consumers and facilitate trade.

Distribution

The Government has established 2 farmers' shops in the capital (Dili) to enable local producers reach consumers in urban centres. In addition, various private sector actors, including supermarkets and street vendors are involved in promoting these linkages.

Government plans to establish an additional 4 farmers' shops in Dili and 12 in municipalities to facilitate food distribution and incentivise farmers to continue food production activities.

In addition, agriculture shops will be established at the post-administrative levels and Government will review the price support scheme for imported rice (and other foodstuffs) to encourage local producers and traders to respond to market signals. The establishment of farmer groups within the school catchment areas will create linkages and support home grown school meal programs.

In partnership with the private sector, Government will establish a national agricultural information system to provide easy access to market information, regulations, price, and distribution.

Consumption

In partnership with relevant development partners the Government will strengthen nutrition social behaviour change communication (SBCC) including meal preparation using locally available products and broader nutrition and lifestyle messages. Consistent SBCC messages supporting improved utilisation of healthy, safe local foods will be included in the child focused conditional cash transfer program, the nutrition sensitive agriculture program, with mother support groups and in other programs targeting women and children and the first 1000 days.

Of importance will be making changes to legislative and regulatory frameworks to ensure a healthy food environment. Government will trial a national rice fortification program, establish regulatory frameworks for the marketing of breastmilk substitutes and establish consumer associations.

Food Systems Coalition and Approaches

The food system dialogues have clearly demonstrated that to achieve results, global and national collaborations across sectors are essential. In line with the ambitions of the Summit and recognising the importance of collaboration to support the transformation of food systems, Timor-Leste has signed the global School Meals Coalition and made the following commitments.

- Increase coverage of the national school feeding program from 150,000 to 300,000 children in five years.
- Establish a budget line to finance school feeding from domestic resources.
- Develop or revisit a national policy on nutritious school feeding.
- Establish a national directorate on school feeding in the Ministry of Education.
- Promote Home-Grown School Feeding linking schools and local agricultural production.
- Adapt other modalities of the school feeding programme including take-home rations or cash vouchers.
- Establish a national school feeding working group involving all relevant stakeholders in the country.

Also, the Government has committed to participating in the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) initiative, promoting greater action toward ending malnutrition, and implementing a roadmap under the Global Action Plan on child wasting. Aligned with the SDG2CNAP-NFS specific commitments include:

- Reduce the prevalence of low birthweight to less than 7 percent by 2025.
- Increase universal access to health services for 55% and 100% of children under-five and pregnant and lactating women, respectively.
- Improve infant and young child feeding practices by increasing exclusive breastfeeding to more than/equal to 70 percent for infants (< 6 months) and minimum acceptable diet to 45 percent for young children (age 6-23 months)
- Increase access to social protection services by 50 percent for families with children 6-23 months, pregnant and lactating women.
- Improve access to improved sanitation and hygiene.
- Treat wasting in children under 5 years with 80 percent coverage in all health facilities in the 13 municipalities.

Summary

Aligned with the Strategic Development Plan (2030) and the SDG2 CNAP-NFS (2030), the Government is committed to ensuring improved production, processing, handling and utilisation of local foods to achieve food and nutrition security.

An inclusive and authentic participatory approach was used to design Timor's food systems pathway through cross-sector multistakeholder dialogues at national and subnational levels. Similarly, the Government will promote and strengthen collective efforts to strengthen existing partnerships and develop new opportunities to enhance

the national, regional, and global pathway, and calls on relevant government and non-government agencies, the private sector and development partners to work together.

Delivery of the commitments will be guided by a convergent approach whereby all stakeholders, including local producers, family farmers and associations will be empowered to 'own' and execute their part in accelerating food systems transformation for the people of Timor-Leste. The approach will be supported by principles of good governance, inclusiveness, transparency, participation, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

Timor-Leste is committed to supporting this 'Decade of Action' to achieve the SDG goals with the transformation of food systems and the right to good food for all citizens at the core.