

## Transition to sustainable agri-food systems with healthier diets in Sierra Leone - Policy Brief

The EU-funded Sustainable Agrifood Systems Intelligence–Science Policy Interface (SASI-SPI) supports the transition to more sustainable and inclusive food systems. Pilot activities in Bhutan, Colombia, and Sierra Leone combine applied research with participatory approaches to identify key challenges in food systems and explore effective solutions.

Recognising the complexity of national food systems, SASI-SPI focuses on local-level dynamics, aiming to understand how communities access, produce, and consume food, the obstacles they face, and the types of interventions that can be tailored to support sustainable and resilient food systems. In Sierra Leone, SASI-SPI focused on two contrasting regions, Kenema and Port Loko, guided by a central question:

*How can the Feed Salone Strategy effectively contribute to healthier diets for the people of Sierra Leone?*

Research activities were carried out through a close collaboration between Agrinatura and the Sierra Leone Agriculture Research Institute and was supported at the central level by the Scaling Up Nutrition and Food Systems Coordination Unit (SUN&FSCU) within the Office of the Vice-President, and other (sub)national government entities.

Local authorities and government agencies were instrumental in driving the broad consultation process in the selected districts (Kenema and Port Loko), which involved a variety of stakeholders (farmers, transporters, processors, traders, women, youth, local government, NGOs, research and academia, inter-religious councils). The consultative process was combined with data collection in 6 chiefdoms and an analysis of the food systems policy, investments and coordination framework at the national level, which together led to the following conclusions and recommendations. If these recommendations are implemented, the Feed Salone strategy has the potential to significantly improve the diets of Sierra Leoneans.

### **Phase 2 - Unpacking the food system transition challenge<sup>i</sup>**

A lot is already done by the Ministry of Health (MoH) (local health centres, Community Health Workers) and NGOs to raise **peoples' awareness on the importance of diverse and healthy diets**. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) and its international partners are also working to increase awareness.

- The important work on raising awareness on healthy diets (including complementary food for young children) should continue and get reinforced. MAFS' internationally funded projects and programmes should include more substantial activities aimed at that, in collaboration with MoH.

While the six food groups identified in the 'Healthy Eating Plan' are mostly available and consumed on a yearly basis, **some food groups are lacking** in people's daily diets and/or during certain periods of the year.

- A stronger focus on the diversification of staple foods by MAFS and its international partners would help to improve nutrient intakes, while reducing both rice consumption and rice imports.
- Fruits: Improve access to diverse fruit tree seedlings with different maturing periods
- Vegetables: Continue to promote Inland Valley Swamps as a way to enhance the availability and accessibility of vegetables throughout the year.
- Beans and pulses: Increased promotion of intercropping of different kinds of beans and pulses with cassava and oil palms on the uplands to increase the availability and accessibility of beans and pulses.
- Animal protein: Increase the availability and access to fish throughout the year by investigating the feasibility of creating fishponds as part of IVS development.

**School feeding and school gardens** are an effective way of providing balanced, healthy meals to young children.

- Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education should experiment with local procurement of more foodstuffs, while reinforcing financial control measures to monitor the schools' handling of such funds.

**Finance and storage:** Many households sell part of their production immediately after harvest (when prices are low) to repay loans and cover expenses like social events, schooling and medical fees.

- Government, its international partners, donors and NGOs should promote savings options (incl. Village Savings and Loans Associations) that help farmers set aside money when selling agricultural produce.
- Government, its international partners, donors and NGOs should (continue to) promote appropriate and affordable storage solutions for agricultural produce

The gradual adoption of **small processing machinery** by some rural households, reduces the labour burden on women, who are typically responsible for preparing food for the entire household.

- Promote small processing machinery by supporting small businesses who produce, sell and repair small machinery and tools at local level

**Poor electricity access and poor road networks** at the intermediate and local level are seriously hampering the development of agricultural and fisheries activities.

- Ongoing efforts to improve the electricity network and road network should continue and be reinforced, because these are important drivers that facilitate processing, storage and trade in agricultural and fisheries products and inputs, enhancing the availability and accessibility of diverse food at affordable prices

### **Phase 3 - Refining the vision on the food system transition challenge<sup>ii</sup>**

The main objective behind the **Feed Salone strategy of MAFS** seemed to be to reduce imports of rice and other food products, in order to save on foreign exchange.

- For the second half of its implementation period the Feed Salone strategy should place a stronger focus on its objective to alleviate hunger and malnutrition.

The **pillars of MAFS' Feed Salone strategy** were generally well chosen, even though a few gaps were identified.

- The contents of the respective pillars of MAFS' Feed Salone strategy should be reviewed as part of its Mid-Term Review
- A new (cross-cutting) pillar or 'architrave' should be added, which focuses on integrating nutrition considerations in the interventions of the five pillars

The **nutrition policy framework** has recently been enlarged with the formulation of Sierra Leone's National Nutrition Commitments (NNCs) Framework 2025-2030. At the same time Sierra Leone's Multi-Sector Strategic Plan to Reduce Malnutrition (MSPRM) 2019-2025 has recently expired and is due for the formulation of a new phase.

- The current Multi-Sector Strategic Plan to Reduce Malnutrition could be extended until 2028, as part of a nutrition policy umbrella that is called 'Nourish Salone' as the third element of Big Game Changer 1 Feed Salone, combining both the NNCs and the MSPRM.

The current **food systems policy framework** consists mainly of the 8 prioritised food system pathways that were identified in 2021 in the context of the United Nations Food Systems Summit.

- A rapid, limited review of the pathways should be conducted, while ensuring that all of the most relevant ministries have at least one pathway that they are mainly responsible for
- A broader Sustainable Food Systems Strategy and Action Plan should be developed

The Presidential Council on Agriculture/Feed Salone is the highest-level **policy coordination framework** within the government in the food systems domain, with various other relevant committees and working groups feeding into it.

- The Presidential Council on Agriculture/Feed Salone should slightly enlarge its scope by putting equal focus on the three elements (agriculture, fisheries and nutrition) of Big Game Changer 1 Feed Salone
- It could be renamed the Presidential Council on Food Systems/Feed and Nourish Salone

<sup>i</sup> For the full report on this phase see: <https://www.iram-fr.org/ouverturepdf.php?file=sasi-spi-phase-2-report-final-1774278558.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> For the full report on this phase see: <https://www.iram-fr.org/ouverturepdf.php?file=sasi-spi-sl-phase-3-report-final-1774350486.pdf>