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Statement delivered by

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Chairperson, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, talofa and a warm good afternoon to you all.

It is a privilege to speak at this 44th session of the FAO Conference and share with you a little bit of Samoa and our efforts towards fostering innovation to enhance food security. Agriculture and fisheries are integral of Samoan culture, traditions, heritage and identity. Samoa's food systems are dominated by smallholder agriculture and coastal fisheries and are the backbone of household food security, rural livelihoods and social economic resilience.

However, inherent challenges of a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) compounded by external factors have hindered the expanded potential of Samoa's food systems to support food security. Such factors include increased vulnerability to climate change, including the frequency of cyclones, floods and prolonged droughts affecting yields and resource availability.

The gaps in integrated data systems which challenge informed policymaking and farm level planning, market access barriers such as high transaction costs, biosecurity limitations, and small production volumes restrict competitiveness, as well as limitations of scale of production and outdated post-harvest facilities. There is also the capacity gap with the shortage of technical specialists and researchers in critical areas such as agronome, climate science, and fisheries management.

From a small island developing country perspective, FAO's Four Betters Strategic Framework encapsulates these challenges and bring hope of a multilateral response to the challenges faced by SIDS. In fact, the complexity of the food challenges for SIDS is well known, including a growing preference for imported foods and thereby compounding non-communicable diseases and obesity rates.

For Samoa, the development of agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture as key pillars of our food systems transformation have to be an integral part of our overall economic plan which will create employment, improve our food and nutrition security and reduce our reliance on food imports.

A sustainable food system for Samoa must encompass measures to enhance resilience, promote innovation, and ensure equitable access to resources and markets.

So how could we foster innovation for food security for Samoa? Well, climate resilient agriculture systems require investment in adaptive research for salt tolerant, drought resistant and pest resilient crop varieties with a focus on staple crops like taro, breadfruit and coconut. We are pleased that through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, we are able to present how investment could transform cocoa, coconut and taro value chains in Samoa.

We reaffirm the important contribution of traditional knowledge to sustainable practices and local ecosystems, innovating traditional methods of integrated agroforestry systems for soil health, biodiversity, and food diversification should be encouraged.

In the face of more frequent natural disasters and external shocks on global markets, investment should also focus on enhancing the development of climate resilient crop varieties, including building the capacity of local breeding expertise and innovative pruning methods for example.

Even the simplest intervention and innovation as they may seem, the impact for small holder farmers and contribution to the overall food systems for communities are critical. Such examples include tunnel houses which have enabled farmers to achieve year-round harvests, improve crop productivity and quality and protect crops from extreme weather conditions, pests and disease pressures.

There is mechanization on modern machinery which transforms the use of land and boost productivity through land clearance, soil preparation and cultivation. Even feral pig traps and proper fencing –these all count towards sustainable food systems to both value chain development and agro processing, innovating processing and packaging is needed to reduce post-harvest losses and improve market competitiveness. As well as supporting certification and compliance with biosecurity and food safety standards for domestic and export markets.

Value chains begin from the farm and therefore are important to drive community-based agricultural development. Such is the objective of the district-based intervention on four key value chains on poultry, cocoa, seaweed and beekeeping, including to scale up free range chicken farming and improve cocoa processing for commercial markets, organic seaweed fertilizer initiative that will support rural women and promote sustainable farming practices.

On food safety, roadside vendors are supported through access to equipment and display materials to promote sanitary food systems and to reduce food loss and waste.

On capacity building and knowledge transfer we see strengthening of farmer field schools and extension systems for knowledge dissemination as well as incentivizing youth engagement in agritech and agrienterprise development.

Digital transformation of agriculture through strengthening of agricultural information systems, including real time data collection for early warning, market intelligence, and even mobile-based platforms to extend advisory services for remote farming communities and to support farm level decision making.

On fisheries and sustainability, we believe scaling up of fisheries co-management models should incorporate scientific stock assessments and community-based monitoring, as well as the application of low-cost technologies for post-harvest handling, co-chain improvements, and value chain traceability.

As a way forward, strategically, we would need to strengthen research policy and practice linkages through expanding collaboration with regional research bodies including SBC, FAO and universities, and to improve feedback mechanisms between farmers, researchers, and policymakers to ensure innovations are demand-driven and context-specific. We should mainstream climate-smart agriculture and nature-based fisheries management international food security strategy. We should enhance digital infrastructure and agri data systems through investing in ICT infrastructure and integrated database for real time information sharing across the sector. We should also create enabling environments to crowd in private sector investment in agrifood innovation processing and logistics.

Finally, building human capital for agriculture innovation through targeted scholarships, vocational training, and regional technical exchanges to address critical skills shortages.

Samoa recognizes that food security in small island context requires innovation that is practical, affordable and locally adaptable.

We are committed to advancing partnership, scaling proven solutions, and investing in knowledge systems to strengthen our food systems for the long term.

We welcome collaboration with technical partners, researchers, and development agencies to collectively address the complex challenges that we face.