

LIBERIA

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Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends.

At the outset, Please allow me to convey the best wishes of Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Florence Chenoweth and the Government of Liberia to the Director General of FAO. Mr. Jose Graziano da Silva who leads his dynamic and effective team to achieve the goals and objectives in the Strategic Framework.

I am pleased to indicate that our relationship with FAO in Liberia (on the ground) continues to be valuable and well demonstrated again, by the efficiency of the FAO Representative and his dynamic team. This kind of collaboration and cooperation could be viewed as perhaps one of the first steps in establishing **Sustainable Food Systems For Food Security And Nutrition**. Yet, as a billion people continue to live with chronic hunger, we concur with the Director General's request for a one-percent real

increase in FAO's budget, plus less than 4 percent to cover inflation and mandatory staff costs.

Permit me also to express our thanks and appreciation to all of our other development partners for the close working relationship, which we have built together over the years of partnership. Perhaps it is now, more than ever before that we have to become serious partners to establish and develop those **Food Systems that will ensure that food security and nutrition are sustainable for ALL.**

Going forward, I would recommend that a High Level Meeting be held soon with all donors (partners) to establish the linkages and provide the synergy to meet the challenges of food and nutrition security in Liberia. Since some of the donor projects may be aligned to programs by Government, there needs to be better tracking, M & E, and coordination to avoid duplications and waste of scarce resources. Food and nutrition security is not only a Liberia issue, it is a global issue. To fight it, we must fight it together and we will WIN.

Overall, the last six years in Liberia have been devoted to putting in place strategic policies, which have resulted in an annual growth rate between 6 to 8%. Liberia is now moving to the period

of transformation and has adopted an Agenda for Transformation (AfT) with two basic long-term objectives: first, in ten years, Liberia should not be aid-dependent. Liberia should move from aid dependency to sufficiency. Second, by the year 2030, Liberia should move into a middle-income country status. It is highly possible considering Liberia's relatively small population of around 4 million people and with its vast natural resources. The AfT also has a medium term growth strategy, which is geared toward improving the business environment and management of the country's natural resources for inclusive growth.

In order to achieve true transformation, there must also be an agricultural transformation. Unlike in the past, the present stakeholders in the agricultural sector are many and varied. To achieve "Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition" all of the stakeholders have to become involved and work together. In Liberia, the Ministry of Agriculture is the Sector leader but many of our donors and development partners participate in its transformation.

Liberia is mainly an agrarian economy, with 70% of the population depending on agriculture for livelihood. According to the Central Bank of Liberia, real gross domestic product (GDP) was US\$835.10

in 2012, with agriculture and fisheries making up 36.9%
or US\$226.20.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) established the Program Management Unit (PMU) in 2010 as part of its ongoing reform initiative to ensure effective and efficient management, implementation and coordinator of donor-funded projects within the framework of the Liberia Agriculture Sector Investment Program (LASIP). LASIP is a direct result of a project proposal written after the signing of the compact from the Comprehensive African Agriculture development Program (CAADP). LASIP proposes programs and budgetary support to address the key constraints of the sector, which includes, high pre- and post-harvest losses, lack of processing and storage facilities, limited use of improved seeds and access to market. The estimated total committed donor funds to the MOA since the PMU was established up to date is about **US\$138.64 million**, covering one on-going project (**Agricultural Sector Rehabilitation Project – ASRP**) and three up-coming projects over the next six years. These activities, empowering and supporting more than 50% of the population through agricultural activities will improve income, by increasing food production and commercialization and will tackle the issues of food insecurity and nutrition.

In addition to the establishment of the National Food Security & Nutrition Steering Committee headed by the Minister of Agriculture, there is also the Agriculture Donor Working Group (ADWG) a venue where all donors in the agriculture sector meet monthly to review the sector, discuss issues that are reviewed by Government and together chart the best way forward.

According to the preliminary findings of the 2012 Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS), approximately 65% of the population is food secured with 35% either food insecure or highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Rural households are more affected by food insecurity with the Southeastern counties of Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee, Sinoe and Rivercess bearing the greatest level at 65.2%. However food security has increased in the greater Monrovia area, with 97% of the households being food secure.

Consequently, concerted efforts have been made to develop policies, strategies and programs aimed at fulfilling the Ministry's overall mandate, including the attainment of self-sufficiency in food production, increasing the nation's ability to earn and conserve foreign exchange, augmenting farmers' income and daily

purchasing power, and, as well as, initiating a transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming as a means to increase productivity and income of smallholder farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture, in a bid to mainstream gender activities and address the issues affecting men, women, boys and girls, has drafted and validated a Gender Policy document aimed at mainstreaming gender activities in the agriculture sector.

Food Production and Imports

The Liberian Government prioritizes the production of the national staples, rice, and cassava. Although the results of the 2011/2012 agriculture survey have not yet been finalized, the rice and cassava production for 2011 amounted to 298,460 metric tons (mt) and 495,800 mt respectively. Fish and livestock production is very minimal and subsistence. Fish landed in 2009 was around 5000 metric tons while domestic livestock production amounted to 216,540 heads of cattle and 3.1million birds. This quantity does not meet national consumption requirement; the deficit is offset by imports.

The priority import for government is rice. Cassava products such as farina and fufu are also imported through the informal sector. Fish, livestock and animal products also constitute major imports.

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the total rice imported in 2012 was 202,513.51MT. It is difficult to quantify the total cassava products that came in during the same period through the informal sector. 15, 858 metric tons of fish valued at about US\$5.5million was imported in 2011. \$5.0 million dollars' worth of eggs and 9.0 million dollars' worth of chicken and pork products are imported yearly into the country.

Food Security

Food security as you all know is not agriculture because agriculture or agricultural production is a part of food security. Food security has been defined by the World Food Summit as, "When all people, at all times, have physical and economic access, to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods, that meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Food security is therefore cross-cutting. It is inter-sectoral. It cuts across all other sectors such as, education, health, works/infrastructure, labor, gender, the environment, and farmer development. If food security is to be achieved all of these sectors will have to come together and collaboratively work towards achieving food security.

Food security has three (plus1) dimensions:

- ✓ Physical **Availability**
- ✓ **Accessibility** – physical and economic
- ✓ Food **Utilization** and
- ✓ **Stability** of the other three dimensions over time

Stability has been introduced here because a country that is not stable, will not be able to achieve food security because people will be moving from one place to another, looking for food, shelter and a secure environment.

Food availability, accessibility and utilization are major challenges facing Liberia, which is attributed to low production and productivity, bad road condition, high post-harvest losses, low income levels, and poor systems of coordination and information management. Liberians are therefore net buyers of food, thus making reduction in the real cost of food a major food security objective. The tree crops sub-sector is marred by ownership and governance issues, old tree stocks and varieties, unimproved germ plasm, and low value-addition. Fisheries, including artisanal fisheries are hampered by weak institutional capacities for planning, advice and monitoring, and surveillance; lack of infrastructure (such as harbors), and limited facilities for storage, processing and handling.

The food security and nutrition component of the Liberia Agricultural Sector Investment Program (LASIP), is a high priority of the Government of Liberia, since a shift to low land production targets entails more women producers.

The LASIP aims to achieve the goal of the National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy that was developed to ensure that all Liberians have access to the food they need and are able to utilize that food to live active and healthy lives. This will be accomplished by increasing food production, making it accessible to all including vulnerable segments of the population, and improving its utilization and systems for coordination and information management. It includes the improvement in the nutritional status of children under five and pregnant and lactating women.

Efforts are being made to rehabilitate, expand, and diversify smallholder tree crops, and agro-forestry. Good governance and sustainable management of fisheries and livestock development is being promoted. Investments are being made to improve women's access to land, credit, inputs and extension services and enhance their participation in value chains.

Comprehensive Food Security & Nutrition Survey (CFSNS)

The Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey, which is one of the monitoring tools for food and nutrition security has been conducted every two years since 2006. The state of Liberia's food and nutrition security has improved from 2010 when food insecurity was reported at 41%, and is now being reported for 2012 at 35%; while stunting on the other hand was 41.8% (WHO cut-off threshold for very high is 40%) in 2010 and in 2012 is reported at 35.8%. According to PROFILES (research done in 2007 on Liberia by UNICEF Consultant), between 2008-2015, Liberia will lose US\$431M, if stunting rates remain above the WHO threshold. While the above stated results may not seem as remarkable achievements, we can safely say that something is being done, and some impact is being made. Nonetheless, we still have a lot more to do, to ensure that we do not fall back.

While food security is achievable, and a lot of programs/projects and/or interventions are being carried out, there are still many challenges faced by farmers and others in their efforts to achieving food security. Some of these challenges are:

- ❖ Access to land
- ❖ Gender issues
- ❖ Access to improved inputs

- ❖ Access to credit
- ❖ Access to new technologies
- ❖ Access to markets – market chain, market information system,
- ❖ Pre and post-harvest losses
- ❖ Storage and preservation facilities
- ❖ Feeder roads
- ❖ Youth motivation – face of agriculture is aging; how can we motivate the youths to become engaged in agriculture
- ❖ Capacity building in food security & nutrition
- ❖ Academic and agricultural activities – need to revisit curriculum of Universities/Colleges and schools to include agricultural activities in schools

Another issue for consideration under this discussion of agriculture and food security is the issue of nutrition security. Nutrition security exists when “food security is combined with a sanitary environment, adequate health services, and proper care and feeding practices to ensure a healthy life for all household members”. (Committee on World Food Security, 2011) We cannot continue to talk about food security without talking about nutrition security.

Ongoing Programs and Strategies

The Government of Liberia, as part of initiatives to address food insecurity and improve livelihoods and the nutritional status of its population, has developed for implementation a number of strategies and programs, some of which are currently ongoing including the following:

1. **National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (2008)**. The key objectives are to make certain that all Liberians have reliable access to the food they need and are able to utilize that food to live active and healthy lives. National Food Security & Nutrition Technical committee and Steering Committees have been established, and a food security and nutrition system mainly comprising Market surveys and Comprehensive food security and nutrition survey has also been established.
2. **Global Agriculture Food Security Program (GAFSP)** - Under this program is the Small Agriculture Productivity Enhancement & Commercialization (SAPEC) Project. The project covers 12 of the 15 counties and its emphasis is on rice, cassava and vegetable value chains, construction & rehabilitation of feeder roads and lowland irrigation infrastructures, and provision of agro-processing equipment. Implementation began in January 2013.

3. **National Cassava Development Strategy (NCDS).** This has an overall objective to increase commercial production (495,800 mt) by at least 50%, and enhance small and medium scale processing facilities to reach at least 75% of the overall cassava production by 2015. The strategy has been validated and endorsed by the President and Cabinet, and cassava has been prioritized in the draft National Export Strategy.

4. **Food and Enterprise Development (FED) Project**

FED is a USAID project, which will be implemented to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase agricultural productivity and profitability and improve human nutrition
- Stimulate private enterprise growth and investment
- Build local technical and managerial human resources capacities to sustain and expand accomplishments achieved under objectives one and two.

FED's resources are also aligned with the LASIP pillars.

5. **Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project (ASRP).** Specific objective is to reduce poverty by increasing the income of farmers and contribute to food security. The key components are:

- Agriculture Infrastructure Rehabilitation & Development – Rehabilitation/ construction of feeder roads; water management & community infrastructures-markets, agro-processing machines, storage facilities, etc.
- Agricultural Production & Productivity Improvement – on-farm technology transfer & capacity building.
- Project Management – institutional capacity building

The ASRP was launched in March 2010, and is being implemented in 8 of the 15 counties, namely, Cape Mount, Bomi, Montserrado, Grand Bassa (funded by IFAD) and Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland and Grand Kru (funded by AfDB).

6. **West Africa Agriculture Productivity Program (WAAPP)**

- Increase rice production
- Capacity building and skills training

7. **Agriculture and Infrastructure Development Project**

The goal is to enhance food security and build capacity of farmers to enable them fully access national and world markets for the crops grown, and rehabilitation of Liberia's ravaged infrastructure to augment the recovery of the agricultural economy.

- Train farmers in improved cocoa crop production practices

- Distribute improved planting materials to graduates of the farmer training program
- Strengthen farmers' organizations, enhance cash crops value chain, and
- Maximize the economic impact of improved transport infrastructure by simultaneously strengthening agricultural production and marketing in areas benefiting from the rehabilitation of rural roads.

The road ahead will have challenges, but as stakeholders in this global arena, we are obligated to work together to establish, develop and implement Sustainable food systems for food security and nutrition to ensure food security not only in Liberia but globally.

Thank You.