

Statement delivered by
His Excellency Mahendra Reddy
Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment of the Republic of Fiji
on the occasion of the
42nd Session of the FAO Conference (14-18 June 2021)
16 June 2021

Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of Fiji recognizes the work that FAO has undertaken to push for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life through accelerating innovation, technology, data, governance and institutions to transform today's agri-food systems for a tomorrow where no-one goes hungry.

FAO, over the years, has always been a partner in the development of Fiji's agriculture sector through provision of technical support in policy formulation and planning, creation of opportunities for investment and enhancement of commercial agriculture. This engagement considers multi-dimensional vulnerabilities that will ensure resilience and sustainability of the industry.

Through FAO's guidance, the Government of Fiji is looking at other alternatives and the best way forward to build a more sustainable and resilient food system in light of the current pandemic and climate related shocks. In response to COVID-19, Fiji, through the Ministry of Agriculture, has designed an Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan focusing on initiatives to support the priorities of the Agriculture five-year Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023).

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Delegates,

The plan includes long-term food and nutrition security through the distribution of seeds and seedlings to rural and urban communities, support to commercial agriculture ventures through investment promotion, construction and upgrade of farm roads to create market access, as well as the establishment of nurseries and orchards to ensure a sustainable and extensive seed bank. Progressively, the plan focusses on expanding agriculture to its full potential to raise national income and become the leading export earner for the country, at the same time addressing key objectives for the improvement of rural livelihoods.

Further to the above, there are a series of policies and initiatives formulated to bolster agricultural output and growth. These strategies realize agriculture's aspiration to "Grow Beyond", targeting incremental growth and spearheading a paradigm shift in agriculture. This was evident in the total gross volume and value of agriculture production of 2020, which increased by 5.6 percent and 2.9 percent respectively, as compared to 2019. Fiji acknowledges the importance of the multi sectorial approach which will ensure increased production, elimination of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and mitigation of shocks.

Despite the current pandemic, Fiji has also experienced its fair share of tropical cyclones. Towards the end of 2020 and earlier this year, the devastating impact of two back-to-back cyclones resulted in more than Fijian Dollar 160 million worth of damages. Both cyclones occurred amidst the pandemic causing unprecedented financial challenges to our farmers.

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Fiji recognizes that through FAO's partnership, designing and implementing comprehensive programmes and coherent public policies will address the achievement of the outcomes of the "four betters" which will reflect the interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agri-food systems. Therefore, Fiji will continue to ensure the implementation of agricultural programmes that encourage a strategic and systems-oriented approach to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Fiji's food systems approach facilitates the identification of leverage points along the continuum from production to consumption. The approach also requires that different sectors work together to push for transformations of different parts of food systems. As food security cannot only be addressed as an agricultural issue, obesity, overweight or anemia cannot be seen as a mere health problem. As such, Fiji is vigorously pursuing the finalization of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security aimed at bringing together multi-sectorial players within Government to prioritize and coordinate interventions that will ensure a sustainable and healthy food system.

For the past five years, Fiji has invested more than Fijian Dollars 300 million through its Annual Budget Allocation on Fiji's agriculture sector, with the vision of establishing a sustainable, competitive and resilient agriculture industry that will create an enabling environment for economic opportunities, climatic viability and food and nutrition security for all Fijians. This mandate has been the guiding principle in transforming Fiji's agri-food systems through initiatives that will ensure, improved food and nutrition security, farmers' livelihoods and effective implementation of climate smart agriculture and continuous support to farming as a business.

Since May 2021, Fiji has organized national dialogues on the five Action Tracks of the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit scheduled for September, 2021. Completion of these national dialogues recorded participation of 580 interested stakeholders from different sectors throughout the country such as Government officials, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, external and bilateral partners, community leaders, academics, food processors and farmers. The outcome of these discussions focused on new policies and approaches that will be reflected in future strategies to transforming Fiji's agri-food system.

The Government of Fiji recognizes the role of the agri-food system in addressing hunger and malnutrition through the COVID-19 pandemic; notes FAO's strategies on its systems-based approach in transforming agri-food systems to reverse the hunger trend, investing in rural transformation and empowering vulnerable populations and supports FAO's multi-pronged approach of putting knowledge into action through digitalization and sustainable rural development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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On that note, Fiji is grateful to be part of the 42nd session of FAO Conference and wishes all delegates a successful meeting and deliberation that will foster positive outcomes and ensure continued transformation of our agri-Food system strategy into action.

Thank you, Vinaka Vakalevu and Dhanyavaad