

Statement by the Head of Delegation of Liberia, Hon Charles N. McClain, Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Planning & Development, at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), November 19 – 21, 2014, Rome, Italy

Excellences,
Director General of FAO & WHO
Distinguished Heads of State and Government
Distinguished Delegates
Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations and Private Sector
Partners
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

We appreciate immensely the challenging and demanding work put in towards the preparation of this Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in cooperation with the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF), IFAD, IFPRI, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, WFP and the WTO. We also applaud the key objectives of ICN2 and hope these will build on ongoing global political processes and initiatives to contribute to the post-2015 UN development agenda including identifying priority areas, nutrition development goals as well as the policies that are required to **achieve, measure and account** for them. This is in line with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (**CAADP**) Framework for African Food Security and African Regional Nutritional Strategy 2005 – 2015.

Liberia also appreciates the rationale of the 2014 Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Global Gathering held just before ICN2, the purpose of which is to maximize interactions between the two meetings. The ICN2 is therefore expected to set the context in which the SUN Movement will continue to grow and evolve. It will provide an opportunity for stakeholders in the SUN Movement to contribute to the determination of national and global public policy priorities for the coming decades. ICN2 is also an opportunity for its participants to learn more about the progress and approach to scaling up nutrition in countries and how their support will

accelerate progress. Needless to say, we fully support and are committed to achieving the objectives of the SUN Movement Global Gathering.

In Liberia, we indeed recognize the impacts of the current Ebola epidemic on food security, nutrition and livelihoods of affected communities, with a potential to cause long-term food insecurity as a result of prolonged disruption of crop harvesting, incomes, markets, livelihoods, and subsequent planting. We are grateful, very grateful and applaud the efforts by WHO, WFP and FAO working together with other nations and donor partners in curbing the spread of Ebola in all affected countries in West Africa.

Liberia joined the SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Initiative in February 2014 and has begun dialogue with the Regional SUN Secretariat for the setup of a National Secretariat and to incorporate the objectives and implementation strategies. Although a multi-stakeholder platform has not yet been established, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) is already convening line ministries, stakeholders and partners.

Meetings with line ministries are still in progress, but with the prevailing ebola situation and STATE of EMERGENCY, meetings of such were pending until the situation improves. I would like to report that the STATE of EMERGENCY has been lifted. However, we are not there yet and have no room for complacency. These meetings are planned to be shortly reactivated.

Meanwhile, a letter from the MOHSW to the President of Liberia for the endorsement of a SUN Secretariat and the nomination of both a focal point and a donor convener has been submitted. The main priorities described in the letter included the reduction of stunting, scale up of nutrition specific interventions, and the integration and expansion of nutrition-sensitive interventions.

UNICEF is still the interim donor convener until the National Focal Point is identified and the secretariat is set up.

The 2012 poverty reduction strategy positioned nutrition as a national priority in the overall development agenda. In 2014, it is still aligned with the Agenda for Transformation (AFT).

The Liberia Agriculture Sector Investment Program (LASIP) - derived from the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) includes a specific component on food security and nutrition to achieve nutritious food production and the provision of nutrition supplement.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) are in the process of harmonizing all plans to address malnutrition. The MOHSW is already engaged in the process of developing a multi-sectoral, national nutrition implementation plan that fully embraces both direct nutrition interventions as well as nutrition sensitive actions.

Completion of these documents should have been a part of planned meetings among the sectors, but as the STATE of EMERGENCY has been lifted; all meetings related to programs implementation will be re-activated as soon as the alarming situation is further reduced or completely contained. Meanwhile all documents are currently being identified by sectors. MOA is reviewing the national strategy for Food Security and Nutrition and MOE has developed a draft School Health and Nutrition strategy that must also be reviewed.

Nutrition interventions have been a part of the essential package of services since 2011. Stunting reduction remains the key national priority. Nationally, 32% of the under 5 years population is stunted or chronically malnourished. In some parts of the Country the stunting levels are above the WHO thresholds of 40%. This is unacceptable and effective programs must be developed and implemented to reduce the numbers.

In order to reduce its rate, a set of Essential Nutrition Actions (ENAs) has being rolled out in five (5) Counties. Nutrition partners are being proactive and making emergency plans to continue supporting Liberia even in the wake of the ebola situation. Such plan is yet to be finalized and implemented.

Liberia has also begun reviewing its national Food Security and Nutrition strategy and action plan to update and align it with the SUN strategies. However, with the ebola epidemic, the nutrition indicators are deteriorating

because food access has been reduced due to limited purchasing power of households and limited market access as a result of restrictions on movement, reduction in income activities and market suspension in most of the rural areas.

Moreover, school feeding programs implemented by Liberia and the World Food Program (WFP) have also been suspended because schools are closed and therefore 127,000 school children and 5,000 girls who were receiving nutritious meals at school are negatively impacted.

Other programs in support of nutrition rehabilitation closed down in the health facilities when the ebola virus hit and infected and killed several health workers including doctors and nurses. The Nutrition Cluster led by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has developed guidelines to ensure implementation of protocols to support and intervene in nutrition issues in the ebola Treatment Units (eTUs)

The National Food Security Cluster (FSC) which is chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and meets every 2 weeks includes line Ministries, development partners, International and national non-governmental organizations Together, we are working to ensure that food and cash transfer assistance to the people affected by ebola are effectively implemented supported by internationally accepted standards

The Ministry of Agriculture, in line with the national ebola response objectives, has also prepared and presented to the Ministry of Finance & Development Planning for available funding several quick impact projects aimed at improving access to food and restoring livelihoods in the affected areas. These projects are geared towards the supply of certified seed rice and agro-chemicals to smallholder farmers, and the production of poultry, small ruminants, aquaculture, pork and pulses to replace eating of bush meat and contribute to food and nutrition security.

In conclusion, we also recommend to the United Nations General Assembly to endorse the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, as well as the Framework for Action which provide a set of voluntary policy options and strategies for use by governments, as appropriate, and to consider declaring a Decade of Action on Nutrition from 2016 to 2025 within existing structures, policies and available resources.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION