



UN- MOA Joint Dialogue on Eritrean Food Systems Strategies

A joint dialogue on Eritrea's food systems strategies was conducted on the 15th of August 2024 in the premises of the Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture's headquarters.

Led by H.E. Mr. Arefaine Berhe, the Minister of Agriculture, the high-level meeting witnessed participation of key representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Ministry of Finance and National Development (MoFND), the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRCO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other stakeholders.

Shedding light on the MoA's strategies to achieve the ministry's goal which is "Safe and Nutritious Food for Everyone, Everywhere", Minister Arefaine asserted that the goal is achievable for it was properly designed by engaging all relevant bodies.



H.E. Arefaine Berhe

He noted that the MoA has formulated three strategies based on their scope of implementation and capacity of the farming communities.

According to him, the Small and Productive Farm Plot (SPFP) Strategy, which is being piloted this summer throughout the country, is expected to revolutionize the farming culture of very small farming communities by engaging them in small but productive agronomic practices. He also noted that



the initial package cost estimate necessary to boost this program stands at only USD 270 per unit. This is supposed to cover mainly the costs of water, compost and improved seed. The SPFP Scheme is designed with a special focus on rain-fed and water-stressed areas, and farming households are expected to intensively cultivate different crops in a 1,000-square-meters plot.

The mode of implementation during the main rainy season is fully dedicated to cereal crops. In the following two seasons, the plot is to be divided into 800 square meters and 200 square meters. The first part of 800 square meters is expected to be set aside for cultivation of pulses, while the small plot of 200 square meters is further divided into four sub-plots for growing vegetables. Sweet potato, while rotating in the sub-plots, will always be there, and the other 3 sub-plots will be covered with tomato, lettuce, Swiss chard, Okra, pepper and so on, depending on the climatic setting. Additionally, backyard poultry farming and beekeeping based on use of top-bar hive are expected to be sustainably introduced as integral parts of this farming system. In this connection, H.E. Mr. Arefaine emphasized that farmers who solely depend on livestock for

their livelihood are expected to selling part of their stock to buy products that they don't produce themselves like grains, vegetables and fruits.

The Minister mentioned the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package (MIHAP) as a second strategy that focuses on small farming household with water source. Beneficiaries of this scheme are expected to acquire or to possess, but not necessarily at one time, one improved indigenous or cross-bred dairy cow or 12 shoats that are to be kept inside and fed through a cut-and-carry system, in addition to 25 chicks, 2 bee colonies, a vegetable plot, and 30 trees for fruit, fodder supplement, firewood and bee forage.

Minister Arefaine also mentioned the Small and Medium Commercial Farmers Strategy (SMCFS) as a third scheme to boost productivity and agricultural employment. With regards to this, the minister elucidated that farmers who are included in this scheme only need enabling environment that includes access to credit and finance as well as training and technological support.

The Minister reaffirmed that all these strategies are properly

mainstreamed in the third and current strategic plan of the Ministry (2024-2028). Finally, he called for reinforced development partnerships with all relevant UN agencies to meet the country's goal: 'safe and nutritious food for everyone; everywhere in time; and also thanked the initiative taken by the UNRCO to organize such a fruitful event.

During the event, Ms. Nahla Valji, the United Nations' Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator to Eritrea, on her part, said that the UN is highly focused on collaborating with Eritrea pursuing food security, taking into account that it is a priority for the country. She also confirmed that the UN agencies in the country are due to align the cooperation framework available with the sectorial priorities in a bid to draw a viable joint plan for sustainable impact.



Ms. Nahla Valji



She further expressed appreciation for the MoFND's role in coordinating the UN and other initiatives in Eritrea, which is key for a more concerted action and impact.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Samson Berhane, Head of the International Development Cooperation Department in the MoFND, outlined that the Government of Eritrea (GoE)'s national priorities are clearly aligned vis-à-vis the UN cooperative frameworks targeting four areas: Capacity building based on equitable quality services; ensuring peace vis-à-vis building accountable as well as efficient institutions; improving the livelihood of people and inclusively diversifying environment-sensitive economy; and promoting climate resilience as well as environmental safety.

According to Mr. Samson, a total of eleven government institutions, including the MoA, are involved as implementing entities of these thematic areas of the cooperation framework, which also reflect the GoE's priorities. Concluding his remarks, he expressed his deep belief that the dialogue is crucial in promoting the efficiency of the Eritrean agricultural sector,



Mr. Samson Berhane

and thereby contributing to the success of the cooperation framework by the year 2026.

As part of the dialogue session, Mr. Tesfai Tsegai, Head of Sectoral Planning at the MoA, presented the MoA's current five-year strategic development plan. He pointed out that the five programs namely; agricultural land and natural resources management program; crop development program; livestock development program; integrated livelihood and agribusiness support program; human and institutional capacity development program combined are expected to direct the MoA's



Mr. Tesfai Tsegai

road map to achieve 'safe and nutritious food for everyone; everywhere'.

Following the SP presentation, Director Generals of the three major technical departments namely Agricultural Extension Department (AED), Regulatory Services Department (RSD) and the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) presented concise statements that support the Minister's elaborations.

Representing the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), Mr. Tsegai Berhane, the Head of the institute, said that research-based production of crops is being conducted

through conventional and modern methods of breeding with primary focus on wheat, barley, maize, sorghum and pearl millet. Likewise, he indicated that flux, nuts and sesame are at the forefront of NARI's research priorities on oil seeds, while the same holds true for a wide range



Mr. Tsegai Berhane

of legumes, horticulture and livestock varieties.

He also mentioned the nutrition-based research initiatives on, but not limited to, potato, tomato, onion, garlic, banana, dates, sweet potato, casava etc.

"We promote the aforementioned research outputs to extend these technologies to farmers," Mr. Semere Amlesom, the Director General of the Agricultural Extension Department, said as an opening remark to his short presentation during the meeting. Mr. Semere mentioned that Eritrea is endowed with many resources for agricultural development despite several prevailing challenges. He explained that optimum agricultural productivity at all levels is attainable for Eritrea based on use of improved seed varieties, application of organic fertilizers, adherence to modern irrigation and mechanization systems, easy access to extension



Mr. Semere Amlesom

services and farmers’ training, as long as land tenure security, and investment incentives are addressed properly.

“A holistic approach that addresses all supply and demand factors is essential for the realization of the set goals,” Mr. Semere said, “in addition to collaboration among policy makers, researchers and practitioners, which is major prerequisite for effective designing and implementation of the necessary interventions.”

In the same vein, Mr. Tekleab Mesghena, the Director General

of the Regulatory Services Department, pointed out that the department relies on promotion of good agricultural practice as a better means of ensuring food safety and quality at farm level as it helps to avoid unnecessary application of chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. He further told that persistent efforts are being made to encourage widespread application of compost and liquid fertilizers to replace synthetic fertilizers.

“Similarly, we are pursuing awareness-raising interventions to promote good manufacturing practices in agricultural processing plants,” Mr. Tekleab elaborated and outlined the legal instruments the department has devised thus far in a bid to enhance safety measures at all levels. And “Taking the Codex Alimentarius as a platform, we are striving to establish a national control of food assessment process in an integrated approach with relevant sectors as well,” he added, and indicated that the ultimate objective is to adopt modern food system approach.



Mr. Tekleab Mesghena

Finally, the participants of this dialogue conducted an extensive discussion where they exchanged views on ways and means of integrating cooperation in all agricultural areas vis-à-vis the MoA’s current strategic plan. Furthermore, the human factor was equally emphasized in light of resource mobilizations in this regard. In conclusion, Ms. Nahla expressed the UN agencies’ readiness to engage in joint cooperation with a goal to building on what the country has already achieved thus far.



General Impressions of Some Participants of the Dialogue

Ms. Nahla Valji



I am Nahla Valji, the UN's Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator here in Eritrea. I am very pleased that we could make such a discussion today. We had all of our UN country team and heads of agencies in the meeting where the ministry shared its vision, goals and strategies. The comprehensive approach that the management has to achieve safe and nutritious food for all Eritreans was well explained to us. This really required a well-integrated approach, and we can see that it is already happening. Last week, I had an opportunity to visit some communities where soil and water conservation, reforestation, solar-power-based irrigation, food value addition, and energy saving stoves are being implemented through an integrated approach. That is an incredibly commendable model that we should be sharing with other countries.

Therefore, we will see how the UN can bring its capacities, expertise and partnership to support the national vision. That was the goal of today's meeting and I think we have achieved it. It is the first of many further discussions. I believe we have the necessary concrete outcomes to move forward together.

Ms. Caroline Mwongera

My name is Caroline Mwongera. I am IFAD's Country Director for Eritrea. I really appreciate the opportunity of taking part in this meeting which served as a forum between the MoA and its potential partners. It was impressive to see that the ministry has embarked on comprehensive and focused strategies. The presentation of the sector's strategic development plan was presented to us in a well-articulated manner, and in light of the set goals. So, the road map is one of our ways where we can integrate our support and collaboration.



IFAD has been working very closely with the MoA. In this meeting, we could figure out the impact and implications of what we have been doing with the ministry, but also identify the areas where we can enhance our partnership and support to the MoA taking into account its strategic focus.

Therefore, my takeaway from this meeting is that we can target several areas of the MoA's strategic plan as entry points of integrated collaboration. As a new area of focus, IFAD can bring its experience and cooperate in developing financing structure. This can for example be done in

pursuance to the SMCFS in a bid to ensure that we together reach communities with the right type of investment approaches and financing instruments.

Another area where we'd like to closely discuss with the ministry, as a stepping stone to establishment of a comprehensive food systems approach, is empowering small and medium commercial farmers' activities across all levels of agricultural value chains.

In general, I value this meeting in light of its significance for ensuring enhanced and impactful cooperation with the country. I think "Safe and Nutritious Food for Everyone, Everywhere" is a very passionate goal which really helps us to see where we are with the GoE right now, and where we can further focus to extend our support. So, we will focus on how we can help concretize the cherished goals.

Ms. Mohammed Aw-Dahir

My name is Mohammed Aw-Dahir. I am FAO Eritrea's Representative Ad-interim. From my organization's perspective, I would like to emphasize on two issues. The first fact is that the most important resource in Eritrea is its own people. I am saving this



sincerely. So, investing in this regard is critical.

The reality of what we have been discussing in order to enhance cooperative work shows a fundamental factor for greater impact. Food security is not only about the physical elements of dietary needs that people are falling short of but rather concerning its dietary correlation and implications to personal intellectual capacity. This makes the right to food, a far-reaching issue where our efforts should go hand-in-hand. So, I think it is time for us to figure out what is doable collectively, and thus streamlining nutrition-sensitive agriculture in

our collaborative works. We know the government is ready to work on this basis. All we need to do is just work together.

Besides, I feel that the issue of investment is another key area where our efforts should converge. The FAO, together with national experts, has finalized seven commodity value-chain analyses and developed investment plan for all of these commodities. I have a deep conviction that if one puts adequate investment in one sector, there is a potential for sustainable results.

Meanwhile, H.E. Arefaine Berhe, along with his senior officials of

the MoA, met and held talks with the delegation from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), led by Mr. Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary of the Commission. The minister disclosed the MoA's pragmatic strategies to achieve safe and nutritious food security for all Eritrean people; and confirmed the sector's readiness to engage with such an important commission to realize its mission and vision. Mr. Claver, on his part, affirmed the ECA's willingness and readiness to contribute in the realization of the sector's vision based on concrete plans which adhere with the commission's mandates.



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