

**Statement of H.E. Arefaine Berhe
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Eritrea**

**On National Pathways for Food Systems
Transformation in Eritrea**

**27 July, 2021
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Greetings / Protocols

As the head of Eritrea's delegation, let me first express Eritrea's gratitude to the organizers of this important Pre-summit which will have a positive contribution in consolidating and fine-tuning our messages ahead of the main Food System Summit in September 2021.

According to the FAO's 2022-2031 strategic Framework, Food System is expressed in four major categories i.e. Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment which leads to Better Life. As this by itself, addresses 12 of the 17 SDGs, let me package my message in line with these main pillars.

Better Production

As Eritrea is found in the Sahel region, lack of water is the main limiting factor for food production. Hence the number one priority of the Government is to implement soil and water conservation programs both on and off farm. Accordingly, numerous dams of different sizes were built over the past 30 years, mainly for irrigation. Around the bigger dams the government has also built several access roads, dry and cold stores. Additionally, the government has invested a lot to expand modified rain-fed agriculture and spate irrigation in the eastern and western lowlands.

To increase production and productivity, the government is also assisting small holder farmers as well as small and medium scale commercial farmers through introduction of high yielding varieties. Furthermore, the government is helping farmers with technologies like shifting to pressurized irrigation using renewable energy, using of plastic tunnels or small green houses and mechanization to produce not only primary products but also value added ones. To implement the ongoing technological support, the government is also working to create conducive environment including land tenure security, development of markets infrastructure, better access to inputs, credits and extension services as well as strengthening of Farmers' Cooperatives.

Better Nutrition

Until recently enough emphasis was not given to nutritional aspect of food security. Under the influence of global approach which focuses on “cereal security” even on cereals, the world in general and Africa in particular has lost its crop diversity to wheat and rice. For the small-holder farmers our flagship project, the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package, MIHAP in short, addresses the issue of nutrition as it combines cereals, horticulture and livestock.

Besides, Eritrea is introducing urban and peri-urban agriculture including vertical agriculture, roof gardening, hydroponics and aquaponics. This aims towards improving nutrition through integrated diversified, nutrition dense house gardens accompanied with short-cycle animals like chicken, swine and rabbits.

Moreover, Eritrea has recorded remarkable success in nutrition intervention at community level through micronutrients deficiency control programs (particularly Iron, Vitamin A and Iodine). Consequently, Eritrea has achieved a Vitamin A supplementation rate of 96% among children under the age of five. In addition, integrated management of acute malnutrition together with maternal and neonatal health service has been expanded in all health facilities.

Eritrea is also strengthening its Fish production, as it is the main source of protein and essential minerals, mainly through continuous availability of fish at local markets and awareness raising campaigns to promote fish consumption habit. This will reverse the current low per capita fish consumption which is limited to coastal areas.

Better Environment

Owing to the cross-cutting nature of environmental challenges, like climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss, national efforts have been made to mainstream environmental issues in all sectors. Furthermore, recognising land as the basis of life and food production, the government has laid the foundation for equitable and fair land tenure system which enables access to land for all citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity and religion. This policy, solved the loopholes of the customary system of agricultural land rotation by changing it into

a life-time use right, which has a better influence on land productivity as it creates a sense of ownership and incentives farmers to more investment on their land and follow sustainable agricultural practices.

However, our effort in the food chain is not going to be sustainable if we do not address the safety issues. Recently, the Government has given a special emphasis to promoting safe-food production using bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides, both solid and liquid forms, mainly from locally available materials.

Better Life

The combined result of all the above mentioned efforts will lead towards realizing a better life to all citizens. This will increase their resilience to environmental and other shocks. Here the best example is the advent of COVID-19 and outbreak of desert locust in our region. The recent locust invasion has caused significant damage to crops and vegetation across the horn of Africa. Despite the unprecedented upsurge, the swarms that appeared in Eritrea were easily controlled before causing any substantial damage through consorted efforts by MoA extension staff, local administration, farmers and members of the Eritrean Defence Forces.

Conclusion

To sustain the so far achieved success in the food system, enough resources should be allocated and build resilience of our farming communities. Looking forward, implementation and further elaboration of all the above mentioned strategies is very crucial to build solid foundation to promote and protect the overall food systems that creates food and nutrition security for all.

Thank you for your attention!