

The CARICOM Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy Explained¹

In December 2010, the FAO Global Food Price Index surpassed the previous high level reached in 2008 which had led to food riots and social instability in many countries. This is the context in which the CARICOM Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy (RFNSP) has been prepared. The RFNSP was endorsed in Grenada at the special meeting of the CARICOM Council on Trade and Economic Development-COTED (Agriculture) in October 2010. This milestone was reached through an innovative policy design process looking at practical issues and problems, in which Member States and regional technical institutions collaborated with the CARICOM Secretariat (CCS), supported by the FAO, in a Technical Working Group² (TWG) to formulate the RFNSP.

This initiative comes in response to the Liliendaal Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security (July 2009) in which Member States reaffirmed a commitment to achieve Food and Nutrition Security (FNS). FNS is a goal of the Common Agricultural Policy from the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, Article 56.1.b.

THE FORMULATION PROCESS

The Policy has been prepared in an innovative way, through a participatory process centred on a Technical Working Group (TWG) involving Member States and Community Institutions which is a fundamental shift from using only consultants. From March to July 2010 the TWG held national consultative workshops to discuss the policy. These meetings brought together diverse stakeholders from various ministries and civil society in order to elicit comments from a broad cross-section of actors involved in the multiple aspects of food and nutrition security.

These workshops informed Member States about the RFNSP and began to articulate the interrelationship between national policy and complementary regional action.

The TWG assessed the region's food security constraints and opportunities, identified national priorities and areas where regional actions could intervene more effectively. The TWG drafted a revised RFNSP to appropriate conclusions.

CONCEPTS THAT UNDERPIN THE RFNSP

WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY

In the Caribbean, in reference to Food Security the definition that *“all people at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”* (World Food Summit, 1996) is agreed on³.

This definition goes beyond the traditional narrow vision of both food sufficiency and the physical availability of food supplies over time and space, to include the socio-economic, nutritional aspects of having adequate economic and physical access to safe and nutritious food supplies. From this perspective, therefore, food security is an integral part of a process of nutrition and health development and embodies four major pillars: Food Availability; Food Accessibility; Food Consumption; and Stability of the previous three components. Food security, in all its dimensions, is

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² The TWG members are Antigua, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, Grenada, Guyana, OECS, CFNI, CAFAN, UWI, and IICA

³ Overview Vulnerability and Food and Nutrition Security in the Caribbean CFNI August 2007

under constant threat in the Caribbean. ***Essentially, food security can be described as a phenomenon relating to individuals. It is the nutritional status of the individual household member that is the ultimate focus, and the risk of that adequate status not being achieved or becoming undermined.***

Food insecurity exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food as defined above

Linking individual food security to national and regional policy - *dimension of entitlements*

The approach developed by Amartya Sen is helpful, since it emphasises the different ways in which individuals can acquire food⁴. The entitlement relationships Sen identifies enable individuals to acquire food in one of four ways.

- They may produce it for themselves (production-based entitlement), which may be particularly important, for example, for small farmers who aim for self-sufficiency. It can be affected by policies altering the demand and supply of factors used in production, some of which will relate to international trade.
- They may sell or barter physical assets (trade-based entitlement). Many farmers will augment their own production by exchanging either a surplus of some crops or an own-food product. The amount of food they can acquire will be influenced by policies that affect the level and variability of prices for food relative to what they are able to exchange.
- They may sell their labour power (labour-based entitlement). Rural landless labourers and urban employees all need to buy or barter food in the market. Their food security is determined by the level and location of employment opportunities which, in turn, may be altered by trade policy.
- They may receive informal gifts from individuals and formal transfers from government (transfer-based entitlement). These are important for those lacking other adequate means. Formal transfers such as food aid may be influenced by multilateral trade agreements.

Contrasting Food Security and Nutrition Security

Food security, as against food production⁵, is concerned with access to food. A household is food secure if it can reliably gain access to food in sufficient quantity and quality for all its members to enjoy a healthy and active life. Food security is a component of nutrition security. However, nutrition security is as concerned with the utilisation of the food obtained by a household as it is with access to this food. A household achieves nutrition security when it has secure access to food – that is, food security – coupled with a sanitary environment, clean drinking water, adequate health services, and knowledgeable care to ensure a healthy life for all household members. ***In CARICOM the problem is access to food that is exacerbated by malnutrition, particularly over nutrition resulting in obesity and NCDs⁶.*** It is clear then that the immediate, urgent problems concern **household access and nutritional adequacy. This means a departure from equating food security with food availability.**

Sustainable Agriculture⁷ and Organic Farming⁸

Sustainable agriculture encompasses many different production methods, systems, and approaches that aim to meet the goals of profitability, stewardship, and quality of life. One of those approaches, but by no means the only one, is organic farming. This then justified the farming systems approach.

⁴ Sen. 1981. op cit.

⁵ There is a clear distinction between an FNS Policy and an agricultural policy.

⁶ Overview Vulnerability and Food and Nutrition Security in the Caribbean CFNI August 2007

⁷ Agriculture is defined under the RTC 2002 to encompass Fisheries and Forestry

⁸ http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/sustain_ag_if_organic.html

Organic agriculture is generally considered to be under the sustainable agriculture “umbrella.” But it is not exactly a subset, since organic practices may conflict with sustainability goals in certain situations. Opinions differ on the relative importance of organic agriculture to sustainable agriculture and on how much research, education, and extension efforts on sustainable agriculture should be directed to organic agriculture.

Three indicators (UN) that appear most frequently in a definition of sustainable agriculture are:

- Environmentally sound
- Economically viable
- Socially acceptable

However, two other indicators⁹ were added in the formulation of the RFNSP which are:

- Technologically sound
- Politically acceptable

In this context, sustainable agriculture embraces all agricultural systems striving to meet these criteria. Many aspects of modern conventional agriculture are included in sustainable agriculture, just as are many aspects of alternative farming systems¹⁰ including organic agriculture.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVE OF THE POLICY

Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) is a cross-cutting issue, and the many linkages between the various national and regional development policies, strategies and programmes and FNS call for these concerns to be incorporated into the formulation and implementation of the latter. Indeed, the resolution of these issues calls for a multi-disciplinary and holistic approach and measures that are a composite of policy, legislative, and institutional realignment actions, enhanced professional and technical capacity, improved processes, infrastructure and client-service orientation, and public-private sector partnership arrangements.

This is the context in which the CARICOM Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy (RFNSP) has been prepared.

The development goal of the RFNSP is **to contribute to ensuring long-term food security in the CARICOM Member States.**

The two major objectives are to:

- 1) Reduce hunger especially in the vulnerable groups by increasing access to affordable, nutritious, safe and quality food.
- 2) Shifting to sustainable food production systems where the producers receive adequate remuneration for their products enabling them to have an adequate standard of living.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

CARICOM countries are recognized as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Low Lying Coastal States (LCS) by the United Nations. Their special characteristics make these countries particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. The factors and conditions impacting on vulnerability are economic, social and environmental. Economic vulnerability includes, *inter alia*, a high degree of openness of the economies, indicated by the high proportion of total trade (imports plus exports) in GDP, volatility of income and high concentration of a few commodities (i.e., limited diversification) in

⁹ As proposed by the PM Agriculture (CCS) without the other two considerations the sustainability becomes precarious.

¹⁰ This would include agroecological agriculture, precision agriculture, sustainable intensification agriculture, agroforestry, agro-silvopastoral, aquaculture etc.

exports and imports. Social vulnerability in CARICOM countries takes expression in several forms, including the brain drain, educational performance and health services that have not kept pace with the requirements of a changing region and issues related to crime, unemployment and HIV/AIDS. CARICOM countries are also prone to natural hazards that are frequent and which result in direct losses in terms of deaths and significant damages to property and income generating assets.

Barriers to access to Food in CARICOM

Access is ensured when all households and all individuals within those households have sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet in accordance with their needs and preferences. It is dependent on the level of household resources – capital, labor and knowledge, and prices. More important is the ability of households to generate sufficient income, which, together with own production, can be used to meet food needs.

In the Caribbean, the minimum wage and tax burdens, as they reduce disposable incomes, make it difficult for persons to afford, the often higher priced, healthy foods. Limited incomes also impact the incidence of poverty, which in turn, limits access to food. Despite considerable economic progress in post-independence CARICOM, poverty and inequalities in income and access to resources are at unacceptably high levels, and continue to be major challenges in this region. An estimated 25% of the population of CARICOM is said to be living below the poverty line. In CARICOM (excluding Haiti), it is estimated that over 600,000 persons are under-fed or hungry ever day due largely to the poverty levels, which range between 8 - 33% in the region. Income inequality in the Region is among the highest in the world and this is also expressed in inequality in consumption, where for some countries (e.g., Jamaica) the lowest 10% of the population consumes 12 times less than the top 10% of the population. This means that these persons do not have adequate income to purchase a standard basket of goods that meet daily dietary energy requirement.

Poverty in the Region is compounded by poor communication/marketing, storage, and transportation infrastructure. The issue of rising prices (which reduce the ratio of wages to prices), constrain the ability of the population, especially the poor and vulnerable groups, to purchase food and basic non-food items. The poor tend to be the most affected since expenditures on food usually account for between 35 and 40% of the household budget. Food consumption patterns among the poor are often characterized by the utilization of diets that have a high proportion of the relatively more affordable processed carbohydrates and limited quantities of fruits and vegetables and meat and dairy products. Soft drinks, sweet biscuits, pastries and cakes are among the highly consumed products – often called ‘junk food’. Inefficient and inequitable distribution networks due to inadequate national and regional marketing, transportation infrastructure and marketing information systems limit the flow of local foods internally and in trade around the region.

The discussion on food and nutrition security must always consider the development challenges that CARICOM countries face in terms of their small size, vulnerability to natural disasters and a challenging new economic environment characterized by, *inter alia*, international competitiveness, loss of preferential markets for traditional agriculture and a rules-based approach to agriculture policy. Income distribution in the region is highly unequal, with some countries among the most unequal in the world. These challenges are further complicated by high international debts in many countries, which divert resources away from government investments, especially social programs, and place severe pressures on the fiscal side of government policy.

THE POLICY

The policy is grounded in the commitments made by Member States in adhering to the Right to Food Convention as well as those made at the World Food Summit in 2009, especially Principle 3:

Strive for a comprehensive twin-track approach to food security that consists of: 1) *direct action to immediately tackle hunger for the most vulnerable and 2) medium and long-term sustainable agricultural, food security, nutrition and rural development programmes to eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty, including through the progressive realization of the right to adequate food. It will also enable them to achieve Millennium Development Goal 1, namely, to reduce respectively the proportion and the absolute numbers of people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition by half by 2015 and to measure progress towards its achievement.*

The policy is set in the context of a mix of pro-actively linked national and regional policies including the Community Agricultural Policy (CAP), Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), Caribbean Cooperation in Health (CCH), Community Agribusiness Strategy (CAS) in support of health and nutrition, domestic food production and allied services at all stages and levels of the agri-food supply chain. There are also on-going discussions on Agricultural Risk Management and Crop Insurance Policy and Programmes.

The COTED acknowledged that regional food security is not the exclusive remit of the agriculture sector and that the resolution of particular problems requires complementary inputs and coordination among different sectors (agriculture, education, health, trade, industry and infrastructure,) and at different levels (household, community, national and regional). They also agreed that the policy should be adopted as the sole, comprehensive and integrated framework for actions to achieve the objectives of adequate availability, access, utilisation and stability of food supplies throughout the Region. The RFNSP has also been accepted by CARICOM's international development partners as the framework to guide their interventions in the field of Food and Nutrition Security in the Region.

The RFNSP established 4 goals:

- **Food Availability** - Promote the sustainable production¹¹, processing, preparation, commercialization and consumption of safe, affordable, nutritious, high quality Caribbean food commodities/products. **This concerns food, agricultural, rural, infrastructural development, land use and trade issues.**
- **Food Access** - Ensure regular access of Caribbean households, especially the poor and vulnerable, to sufficient quantities of safe, affordable, quality food at all times, particularly in response to diverse socioeconomic and natural shocks. **Prices, incomes, agricultural public health, food safety and social development issues.**
- **Food Utilization/Nutritional Adequacy** - Improve the nutritional status of the Caribbean population, particularly with respect to NCDs including diabetes, hypertension, overweight and obesity. **Healthy lifestyle choices from early childhood-education, health, nutrition and social welfare issues.**
- **Stability of Food Supply** - Improve the resilience of the region's national communities and households to natural and socio-economic crises **Information and early warning systems, disaster preparedness and management, and adaptation to climate change issues.**

It is clear, given the scope and nature of these goals, that policy and investment actions for their achievement require a holistic approach.

THE WAY FORWARD

¹¹ As described using the concept of sustainable agricultural production.

COTED agreed that the next step in the process would be the preparation of an Action Programme/Plan, using the same modality of the TWG and giving priority *inter alia* to the following areas:

1. Promotion of increased availability of regionally produced nutritious food (looking at the whole supply chain from farmer to consumer) at remunerative market prices so as to increase production, productivity and returns to farmers;
2. Identification and mapping of vulnerable groups (who are the food insecure, why are they food insecure and where are they located?) with special emphasis on women, children, the elderly and the physically and mentally handicapped, and establishment of a national and regional database of this information;
3. Removal of non-tariff barriers to trade (SPS-TBT barriers) that increase marketing costs and hinder access to and distribution of food within the Region, as well as the development of strategies to address regional transportation so as to reduce distribution costs and improve the movement of food commodities across the Region;
4. Promotion of healthy Caribbean diets and optimal nutrition to reduce Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), obesity and malnutrition, especially at all stages of the education system;
5. Building of resilience to the recurring threats to food security bearing in mind that the Region is prone to the risks posed by climate change and natural disasters, through the establishment of a Regional Information and Early Warning System for Food and Nutrition Security, the construction of risk profiles for the Region's main crops in support of emergency preparedness, agricultural risk management and crop insurance.

The Thirty-Eighth Special Meeting of the COTED (October 2011, Dominica) endorsed the proposed Action Plan and focus is now being placed on its execution.

The COTED has endorsed the following recommended Steps for immediate action for the implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan in Member States:

- **Step 1 - Establish or strengthen a multi-sector government institution dealing with food and nutrition policy:** A multi-sector national governance mechanism is needed in order to reach different sectors through advocacy and the development of partnerships.
- **Step 2 - Revise current food and nutrition security action plans and sector policies: The revised action plans** should clearly identify the time scale for implementation of the different actions, the lead implementing agency and the allocation of resources. Member States should establish specific targets for each of the food and nutrition security goals, as well as specific food safety goals, taking into account available resources and priorities.
- **Step 3 - Prioritise the implementation of specific actions:** The choice of actions should be based on the stage of national policy and capacity development reached.
- **Step 4 - Operationalise the Action Plan through a combination of macro-economic policies, regulatory frameworks (legislation, regulations, etc.) and fiscal and other measures:** Actions should, *inter-alia*, be designed at both national and local levels, with particular attention paid to community interventions and the awareness building potential of settings such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces.
- **Step 5 - Establish dialogue and partnerships with all stakeholders:** Private non-profit, especially civil society and profit organisations should be engaged in the implementation of action plans, with clear identification of their expected roles.
- **Step 6 - Allocate resources:** Allocating the right mix of human, financial and temporal resources is crucial for successful implementation.
- **Step 7 - Monitor implementation and accountability:** The multi-sector governance mechanism on food and nutrition policy should periodically report to the government, as well as to international fora. The RFNSP and the RFNSAP shall be reviewed periodically and their effects and impacts evaluated at the end of the first five-year period in 2016, or more frequently as deemed necessary.

HALLMARKS OF A SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL POLICY

The RFNSP must be focused on priority problems, interests and needs of governments, communities and households.

The RFNSP must be multi-sector in nature in order to address the complex food and nutrition security issues in the region. There must be complementary inputs from and coordination between various sectors (e.g. agriculture, health, markets, trade and education) and at multiple levels (e.g. household, community, national and regional).

The RFNSP must serve to identify added-value collective regional measures for Member States. In so doing it secures benefits and positive economic outcomes that Member States would normally be unable to achieve when acting in isolation.

CONCLUSION

The RFNSP has been validated as in general it has all the components of recommendations made late last year by the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change of the CGIAR¹².

In the lead up to UN global climate talks in Durban, South Africa, from 28 November to 9 December 2011, an independent global commission of eminent scientists has released a set of concrete recommendations to policy makers on how to achieve food security in the face of climate change. Based on a thorough review of existing research, the commissioners urged immediate, coordinated action toward transforming the food system to meet current and future threats to food security and environmental sustainability.

The Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change's "[Summary for Policy Makers](#)" outlines crucial policy responses to the global challenge of feeding a world confronted by climate change, population growth, poverty, food price spikes and degraded ecosystems. The seven high level recommendations are:

1. Integrate food security and sustainable agriculture into global and national policies
2. Significantly raise the level of global investment in sustainable agriculture and food systems in the next decade
3. Sustainably intensify agricultural production while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other negative environmental impacts of agriculture
4. Target populations and sectors that are most vulnerable to climate change and food insecurity
5. Reshape food access and consumption patterns to ensure basic nutritional needs are met and to foster healthy and sustainable eating habits worldwide
6. Reduce loss and waste in food systems, particularly from infrastructure, farming practices, processing, distribution and household habits
7. Create comprehensive, shared, integrated information systems that encompass human and ecological dimensions.

¹² Beddington J, Asaduzzaman M, Fernandez A, Clark M, Guillou M, Jahn M, Erda L, Mamo T, Van Bo N, Nobre CA, Scholes R, Sharma R, Wakhungu J. 2011. Achieving food security in the face of climate change: Summary for policy makers from the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change. CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). Copenhagen, Denmark