

# Operationalizing the Recommendations from Nigeria 2021 Food Systems Dialogues: A Position of the Nutrition Society of Nigeria

## **ABSTRACT**

Food systems contribute to major global challenges including persistent poverty, competition over environmental resources, climate change and escalating hunger and malnutrition. The United Nations Food Systems Summit was convened to support governments to identify and implement actions that will transform national food systems toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Nigeria, more than 40 Dialogues involving over 4,000 multisectoral participants including academia, policymakers, the private sector, Non-Governmental agencies and the Nigerian Government were convened by the Nigerian government and other actors. A total of 79 recommendations from these dialogues were consolidated into six clusters to transform Nigeria's food system including; 1) Invest in food security and nutrition knowledge dissemination, skills development, and information management systems; 2) Build sustainable, responsive, and inclusive agricultural input supply and food production systems; 3) Develop value chains and market systems; 4) Increase demand for, and consumption of, adequate, nutritious, and healthy foods; 5) Promote peace-building initiatives, early warning systems, food marketing and regulation standards, and an enabling environment; and 6) Link research, innovation, and extension for a sustainable food system. The Nutrition Society of Nigeria explored the strategy to operationalize the 79 recommendations through a panel discussion and public lecture/engagement and her position includes the need for a national food systems dashboard and command centre; state governments support for food commodities of comparative advantage; filling critical gaps in building capacity for regulatory monitoring; improving on the existing national food-based dietary guidelines; integrating nutrition education into all efforts to transform food systems; active involvement of young people; leveraging the potential business/investment opportunities across the 79 recommendations to generate income while solving food systems challenges; re-positioning the academic/ research community in Nigeria to explore funding opportunities for food systems-related research and build consensus with other stakeholders to define priority research questions across the entire food system. The NSN is committed to supporting skills building around forming partnerships/collaborations, advocacy, and convening consultations to bring stakeholders together.

**Keywords:** Food systems, Sustainable Development Goals, Healthy foods, Improved nutrition

## **INTRODUCTION**

Food systems refer to all inputs, activities, processes, and actors that are involved in getting food to people's stomachs and encompass components of food supply (e.g., food production, processing, marketing, price) as well as food demand (e.g., purchasing power, knowledge, and preferences)(1). The wide range of activities and processes involved in food

systems make them an important source of livelihood for the majority of people in many countries, including input suppliers; farmers; food traders; people working in the food industry or restaurants and other food service outlets; and people working in food advertising. The amount, diversity, nutrient density, and safety of foods delivered by food systems greatly influence food

availability and affordability and consumer behaviour and consumption, thereby affecting food and nutrition security.

The current state of our food systems is one of the causes of several major global challenges. Incomes earned from food systems are low for a considerable proportion of populations, especially vulnerable smallholder farmers, leading to persistent poverty. Competition over environmental resources for food systems use causes significant conflict and violence; food systems are also a major driver of climate change. Similarly, the quantity, quality, and safety of foods presently delivered through food systems contribute enormously to hunger, malnutrition, and diseases. Improving national food systems is therefore indispensable for any country to achieve and sustain progress in development.

In recognition of the pivotal role of food systems, the United Nations Secretary-General convened a United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in September 2021. The overall goal of the UNFSS was to support governments to identify and implement actions that will transform national food systems toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries were encouraged to engage national stakeholders in UNFSS Dialogues in the months leading up to the Summit, to ensure that the UNFSS outcomes address the needs of a wide range of stakeholders.

For Nigeria, more than 40 Dialogues were convened by the Nigerian government and other actors, and these Dialogues were attended by more than 4,000 multisectoral participants from the academia, policy makers, Non-Governmental agencies, private and public sectors etc. A total of 79 recommendations for transforming Nigeria's food system were consolidated from these Dialogues. These recommendations are grouped into six clusters – 1) Invest in food security and nutrition knowledge dissemination, skills development, and information management systems, to enhance agricultural productivity; 2) Build sustainable, responsive, and inclusive agricultural input supply and food production systems; 3) Develop value chains and market systems for improved productivity, improved livelihoods, and poverty reduction; 4) Increase demand for, and consumption of, adequate, nutritious, and healthy foods, including in humanitarian contexts; 5) Promote peace-building initiatives, early warning systems, food marketing and regulation standards, and an enabling environment for food systems activities;

and 6) Link research, innovation, and extension for a sustainable food system.

The Nutrition Society of Nigeria (NSN), as part of her contribution toward national dialogue on food systems, organized a panel discussion around operationalizing the 79 recommendations; during her 51st annual scientific conference, held in September 2021. In addition, the NSN organised a public lecture with the theme – Fostering Innovation in Home Gardening for Sustainable Healthy Diets in Nigerian Households; as part of the 2021 National Nutrition Week held in December 2021. The purpose of the public lecture was to promote homestead and school-based gardening, to foster healthy and sustainable food systems in Nigeria. Widespread homestead gardening (tagged “Operation Feed Yourself”) is one of the Federal Government of Nigeria's focus interventions for commencing actions for food systems transformation.

The position of the Nutrition Society of Nigeria Ensuuing from the deliberations at both the NSN conference and public lecture, the position of NSN is that the academic/research community in Nigeria must facilitate and monitor the deliberate and strategic multi-stakeholder collaborations that must emerge if the 79 national recommendations for food systems transformation are to be achieved. Achieving the recommendations requires collaborations among several groups of actors including policymakers, regulators, service providers, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, youth, the academic/research community, and public/private financiers. Each of these actor groups has distinct roles to play, but there must be synergy across actions. More expansively, the position of NSN is that:

1. The National Council on Nutrition is strategically positioned to coordinate food system actions, given that nutrition is an essential outcome of interactions among food systems and health, sanitation, education, and other systems. The National Council on Nutrition needs to especially support a national food systems dashboard that provides information about food systems characteristics in each state; as well as a food systems command centre that facilitates the coordination of actions across the different sectors of the food system and informs real-time decision making. Action on environmental issues and issues around livelihoods also need to become more visible as part of the National

Council's actions to improve diets.

2. State governments need to identify and support food commodities of comparative advantage and establish themselves as zones of sufficiency for these commodities.

3. Regulatory agencies, including the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), should collaborate with the academic/research community to fill critical gaps in building capacity and deploying officers for regulatory monitoring. The research and academic community should also support studies needed to establish and enforce regulatory standards.

4. The health sector has primary responsibility for the prevention, management, and control of all forms of malnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Prevention of malnutrition particularly requires collective efforts based on partnerships. The food systems must deliver affordable foods that meet the nutritional needs of all members of the population, and relevant line ministries must enact evidence-based policies to achieve such food systems. Also, all food system actors and consumers need to have appropriate and adequate nutrition education to effectively perform their food system roles. The health sector needs to work with other stakeholders to improve existing national food-based dietary guidelines to facilitate such nutrition education.

5. Nutrition education should be explicitly and actively integrated into all efforts to transform food systems in Nigeria, including the Operation Feed Yourself home gardening project. Nutrition education messages should focus on the consumption of nutritious and diverse diets to ensure that increased access to food translates to improved food consumption and nutrition.

6. There should be the active involvement of young people to drive conversations and implementation around food systems transformation. Young people must be engaged when consultations are being held or committees are being formed. Self-development and skill-building opportunities for young people need to be supported through integrating them into existing stakeholder networks, creating mentorship opportunities, and involving youth in advocacy and accountability efforts.

7. Each of the 79 recommendations provides a potential business/investment opportunities that can be leveraged to generate income while solving food systems challenges.

However, appropriate research will be necessary to create such transformative but viable businesses around the recommendations. Collaborations among the research community and private sector are thus needed around each recommendation. Such collaborations should be underpinned by a clear strategy through which research findings will be used to develop commercial enterprises and financial analysis of the profitability of potential businesses. Food innovation hubs especially need to be established in various academic/research institutions to facilitate multidisciplinary research and innovation around profit-oriented food systems solutions. Innovation hubs should be further fostered through challenge competitions where promising research is presented to the private sector for co-creation, co-investments, and launching of businesses.

8. Funding opportunities exist for food systems-related research. However, the academic/research community in Nigeria has not been well positioned in the past to benefit from much of the funding. Local research organizations (public/private) need to become investment-ready by having a well-documented financial track record, strong governance structure, and clear/compelling descriptions of the activities and measurable results/impacts that received funds will be used to achieve. Optimally harnessing funding opportunities will also require strong institutional partnerships with demonstrated integrity, transparency, and accountability.

9. The Nigerian research and academic community need to reach a consensus with other stakeholders about a national understanding of food systems and priority research questions across the entire food system, and then collaborate to answer these questions and facilitate evidence-based decision and policy making. NSN will support skills building around forming partnerships/collaborations, advocacy, and convening of consultations to bring stakeholders together. NSN will further publish guidelines around study designs and methods for conducting studies to answer consensus research questions. NSN will also ensure that research findings are disseminated to appropriate stakeholders and actors for decision-making. In addition, NSN will support the creation of a National Association of Nutrition and Dietetics Students that will include representation from the nutrition association in individual institutions, to facilitate greater youth involvement in national food system processes.

## REFERENCE

1. HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

request or enquiry to the Nutrition Society of Nigeria at [info@nutritionnigeria.org](mailto:info@nutritionnigeria.org).

## STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

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## EXPERT PANEL ON POSITION PAPER

Adeyemi Olutayo (PhD), University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State,  
Ojo Michael(PhD), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Abuja  
Onabolu Adeyinka(PhD) Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Abuja  
Anigo Kola(PhD), Academic and Research Network-Scaling Up Nutrition, Abuja  
Azeez Salawu' Act4food Act4change, Abuja  
Nwuneli Ndidi' Sahel Consulting Agriculture and Nutrition, Lagos  
Ikegwonu Nnaemeka' Coldhubs Limited, Lagos  
Ukaire Binyerem (MBBS, FWACS), Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja

## REVIEWERS

Bartholomew I. C. Brai - Federal University Oye-Ekiti  
Wasiu Akinloye Afolabi - Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta  
Folake Olukemi Samuel - University of Ibadan, Ibadan  
Oluwaseun Ariyo - University of Ibadan, Ibadan  
James Oloyede - Nutrition Coordinator IHANN Project, of FHI360, Maiduguri  
Adedotun Owolabi - Division of Human Nutrition and Health, Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands