



## **Proposed Draft Statement by MAF to IFAD**

**Occasion: The Forty-Fifth Session of the Governing Council**

**Date: Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.**

**Venue: Virtual (Zoom)**

**Theme: “Rural development: a prerequisite for global resilience”**

Mr Chairman, the theme of the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Governing Council has a lot of relevance for Sierra Leone and the world at large. My presentation touches on:

- (i) how the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) in Sierra Leone used the wisdom of that theme in the development of our sector strategies, plans and related policies and practices;
- (ii) how IFAD’s projects in Sierra Leone practicalize that adage at project implementation level; and
- (iii) The presentation ends with making suggestions on how project implementation activities can be catalysts to enhancing rural development, contributing to global resilience.

### **How the Ministry used/use the wisdom of “Rural development: a prerequisite for global resilience” in the development of our sector strategy, plan and related policies and practices**

- *NAT 2023, 2025* -- Upon the new Government’s ascent to office, we recognized that the Ministry lacked a specific sector blueprint. So, guided by compacts, like the SDGs, and at national level, the Medium-Term National Development Plan, we developed the *National Agricultural Transformation 2025 Plan* and the *National Agriculture Transformation 2023 Programme* – the former being the broader National Agriculture Investment Plan, drawn up in accordance with the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP), and the latter by the sub-set.

The four priorities in those blueprints are:

- Rice self-sufficiency

- Livestock development
- Crops diversification and
- Sustainable forestry and biodiversity management

And the enablers are:

- Encouraging women's and youth's participation in agriculture
- Creating the enabling environment for the private sector to thrive and
- Promoting catalytic technology to mechanize agriculture
- *Relocation of all agriculture projects* – in 2018, all projects, as a matter of policy, were relocated to Sierra Leone's interior. The aim of this relocation was/is to take the projects closer to rural areas, where the majority of Sierra Leone's agriculture goes on
- *The Policy Shift* -- In 2020, we energized private sector empowerment by conceiving and implementing a **policy shift**, which took full effect in January this year. That shift has, among others, the following dimensions:
  - Private sector supported to run agricultural machinery every one of the agricultural districts, where the bulk of Sierra Leone's agricultural ring to make sure it is accessible to all; and Government will support farmers with vouchers to get mechanization services; and
  - Central Bank of Sierra Leone to make available a USD \$ 50 million credit facility to get private sector actively engaged starting from Year I.
- *Government and MAF acting on rural area-focus by taking the lead in building resilience* – just after the outbreak of COVID in Sierra Leone in March 2020, Government instituted the Quick Action Emergency Response Programme, MAF's Pillar was *Increasing local food production*. MAF used that intervention to test its focus on the rural areas for private sector-led and machine-driven land preparation, with projects supporting with quality seeds and other inputs. This concerted action resulted in bumper harvests that provided and continues to food for farming families and other community members during the most debilitating period of COVID outbreak.

*How IFAD's projects practicalizes rural development for resilience* Currently, IFAD has two projects operating in Sierra Leone: the *Rural Finance and Community Improvement Programme* (RFCIP) and the *Agricultural Value Chain Development Programme* (AVDP).

For the RFCIP, the Project, among other achievements:

- has the largest rural financial network across the country with 76 functional rural financial institutions (including 17 Community Banks and 59 Financial Services Associations) – the large majority of which are in rural areas. These institutions have targeted 285,00 households, and have already changed the lives of over 215,000 households including women and the youth; and
- IFAD, though this project, is using Sierra Leone as a case study, and this experiment hopes to generate the required funds needed from governments and other partners to change the lives of the rural poor and ensure food security.

Specifically, on the AVDP, the project within the two years of its existence has achieved, among others, the following successes:

- **Inland Valley Swamp (IVS)** – development/rehabilitation of a functioning infrastructure (head bunds, spillways, canals, etc.) and extension service delivery has increased rice production in most of these swamps, as farmers have realized good yields of 3-4 mt/ha in one crop cycle, 6-8 mt/ha for 2 crop cycles and 9-12 mt/ha during the third cropping cycles. This has also allowed some farmers to demonstrate good crop rotational practices for vegetable cultivation as a 3<sup>rd</sup> crop after the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> harvesting of the IVS rice;
- **Cocoa** – 6,000 farmers have been identified for the establishment of 6,000ha of new cocoa plantations in five districts;
- **Oil Palm** – Five thousand (5,000) farmers have been selected to establish 5,000ha of new variety of oil palm (*tenera*). At the beneficiary community level, youths (male and female) have also been engaged for a period of 15 months to manage the decentralized community nurseries, thereby providing them temporal employment and skills transfer; and
- **Vegetables** -- the Project is supporting women farmers, with experience in vegetable production, in Falaba and Port Loko Districts. The women will lead to the production of about 100ha of bulb onions and benefit from improved processing facilities. Additionally, this activity will also support the Government's flagship programme intensifying onion production in the country.

The two projects' integrality in rural areas ensured that the impacts of the COVID, especially on food and livelihood security during the outbreak, was not as bad as in other countries in Africa.

Mr Chairman, our two IFAD projects also support the empowerment of women and youth in agriculture – who are also central to MAF's policy and practice but also support of the SDGs, especially Goals 1, 2, 5 and 10:

Mr Chairman, permit me to move make my observations known on the **global** realization of rural areas-based and women and youth-driven agricultural transformation, with recommendations:

- On an agricultural transformation that has women and youth at its heart, I would suggest that our interventions are not made as if women and youth are the only sectors in societies. There are also men, the aged and children. Gender- and youth-affirmative action-oriented policies and practices should, therefore, be conceived and acted on in ways that acknowledge and get the buy-in of those other sectors, and social support mechanisms, where applicable, should support vulnerable people within the non-youth and non-women brackets for sustainability. This aptly takes me to the next point, a recommendation;
- I would recommend that **agricultural interventions make rural areas attractive for farmers** to invest in the sector and be magnetic enough to retain them. Such an approach

justifies agriculture collaborating with other sectors like *rural development*, *local government* and *economic development* to make those areas generally attractive to other members of society;

- Mr Chairman, as the COVID emergency has taught us all, **communities, countries and regions – even the rich ones – cannot afford to build islands of prosperity when all around there are seas of poverty**. A country can only be considered as truly safe, when all other communities, countries and regions *contiguous* are also safe. So, IFAD's and other partners' interventions in agriculture could do well to **build, through partnerships, internal resilience and contribute towards external resilience**.

Thank you for your audience and continued support.