

Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy

A Call for Action

This policy brief, the second in the recently initiated CCS Food Policy brief series, synthesizes the salient points of the RFNSP and outlines the next steps in its implementation.

In September 2010 in Georgetown, Guyana, representatives of CARICOM Member and Associated States and regional and international private and public sector organizations validated the Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy (RFNSP). 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 CCS and FAO in a Technical Working Group to formulate the RFNSP.

The Elements of the Policy

The RFNSP gives effect to the commitment made by Heads of Government in the Liliendaal Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security (July, 2009) to promote a policy environment favourable to the achievement of food and nutrition security. It is consistent with national food security policies and the spirit and intent of the basic principles of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and the Jagdeo Initiative.

The RFNSP recognizes that as small actors and “price takers” in the world market, CARICOM Member States have no influence over prices and conditions of sale of imported food commodities. This means that Member States must take a regional perspective and jointly collaborate in developing coherent and mutually beneficial responses to major external shocks over which they have no control: high food prices, overwhelming international financial crises and adverse climatic conditions.

These events reduce the Caribbean region’s ability to source stable supplies of safe, secure and nutritious food at affordable prices, with negative effects on social and political stability, human development and economic competitiveness. A regional approach is therefore essential to secure benefits and positive economic outcomes that, acting singly, the countries of the region would normally be unable to achieve.

The RFNSP provides a framework for Member States to focus on food and nutrition security issues in their national development policies, programmes and investments. It introduces the perspective of the consumer and recognises that in order to resolve the diverse and interrelated problems of food and nutrition security, there must be complementary inputs from and coordination among various sectors (e.g., agriculture, health, markets, trade and education) and at several levels (e.g., household, community, national and regional).

The RFNSP unites CARICOM Member States in a shared vision. It provides a coherent, comprehensive and unique framework within which national governments, civil society, private sector actors, regional institutions and external development assistance organisations can partner to achieve food and nutrition security objectives.

Inherent in the RFNSP is a facilitation process leading to direct action to tackle hunger immediately for the most vulnerable; to engage medium- and long-term sustainable interventions to eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty and to foster the right to adequate food.

The Regional FNS Policy focuses on actions and programmes aimed at:

- reducing the total food import bill through increased regional content in food consumption, increased use of local inputs in animal feeds and fertilizers, and increasing the productivity of land, labour and capital in the agricultural sector;
- increasing public expenditure in agriculture, focused on rural infrastructure (particularly irrigation and drainage systems and rural roads), research and development, agricultural health and food safety and market information systems;
- influencing the tastes and preferences of Caribbean households to consume nutritionally balanced foods as a means of safeguarding against chronic non-communicable diseases (obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes and heart disease) that are increasingly prevalent in the Region;
- developing agricultural processing industries buttressed by increased private sector investments and regional production;
- attracting women and the youth to becoming agriculture entrepreneurs; and
- taking effective action, both to mitigate the effects of climate change - a major threat to our food security - and to adapt to its consequences.

Implementation

The RFNSP was endorsed by the CARICOM Ministers of Agriculture, meeting in Grenada at the CARICOM Council on Trade and Economic Development (Agriculture) in October 2010. The Ministers agreed that the policy should be adopted as the sole, comprehensive and integrated framework for actions to achieve the objectives of adequate food availability, access, utilisation and stability of supplies throughout the Region. The RFNSP has also been acknowledged 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 CARICOM Member States agreed also that the next step in the process would be the preparation of an Action Programme/Plan giving priority to the following areas:

- (i) Promotion of increased availability of regionally produced nutritious food (looking at the whole supply chain from farmer to consumer) at competitive market prices so as to increase production, productivity and returns to farmers;
- (ii) 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;
- (iii) 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;

- (iv) Promotion of healthy Caribbean diets and optimal nutrition to reduce obesity, NCDs and malnutrition especially at all stages of the education system;
- (v) 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.