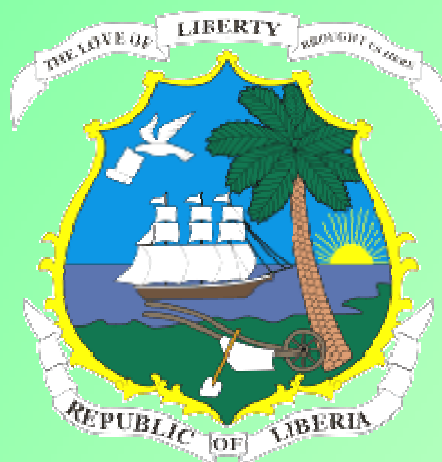


National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy



A cross-sectoral strategy for the Government of Liberia

Prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture
Republic of Liberia
March 2008

Republic of Liberia: National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy

Monrovia, March 2008

Executive Summary

With the publication of this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (FSNS), the government of the Republic of Liberia declares the commitments it will undertake and the activities that it will put in motion to substantially reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition in the country in the next eight years. Government recognizes that to further its ambitions of peace, reconciliation, stability, and development, the nation as a whole and each Liberian household must achieve food security and improved nutrition. Certainly, the Liberian economy rests heavily on the food security and the nutritional well-being of its citizens. By ensuring that all its citizens have reliable physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, government will be laying a strong foundation for not only a prosperous nation, but also a more peaceful and secure nation.

The **key objectives** of the FSNS are to make certain that all Liberians have reliable access to the food they need and are able to utilize that food to live active and healthy lives. As such, ensuring food security and good nutrition is not a policy choice of government that it can decide to accept or reject, but a right of the citizens of Liberia which the government is obligated to respect, promote, and protect.

Although the strategy encompasses the food security and nutritional needs of all Liberians, it prioritizes the needs of food insecure and nutritionally vulnerable groups in society, including the elderly who have little support, female-headed households, orphans, and HIV-affected households. In addressing the needs of nutritionally vulnerable households and in working to safeguard the food security and good nutritional status of others, two demographic groups are **targeted** – infants and children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women. The period from conception through the first two years of life is crucial in terms of food security and nutrition, as growth failure in a child during this period cannot be fully corrected later in life. Consequently, the **central outcome measures** of whether this strategy can be judged successful are those that establish whether the food and nutritional needs of young children in Liberia are being met. If these needs are satisfied, prospects are good that all Liberians will be properly nourished and food secure.

Scope

The FSNS identifies a set of public goods and services that need to be provided in a harmonized manner in order to establish the conditions under which all Liberians can attain food security and be properly nourished. In implementing the strategy, government will **emphasize consultation with, joint action by, and accountability to communities across the country**. Such an approach is necessary to avoid problems of irrelevance to local realities related to food insecurity and undernutrition, lack of ownership outside of Monrovia, and limited accountability by political leaders and civil servants for achieving the objectives of the strategy. Moreover, particular attention will be paid to the **needs of women**. Women in Liberian society, as in most societies, play central roles in ensuring food security and in improving nutrition as household food preparers and caregivers and as food producers and marketers. It is also sensitive to the **needs of youth**, who have important responsibilities for the emergence of a prosperous and peaceful Liberia.

The FSNS is a **cross-sectoral strategy**. It is neither an agricultural nor a rural strategy, in spite of its formulation being led by the Ministry of Agriculture. Its objectives will be achieved through the joint actions of multiple sectors and agencies of government, working with local and international partners, both in civil society and in the private sector. While the

agricultural sector is critical to assuring the availability of food in the country, the participation of several other sectors and agencies is also necessary. Consequently, cross-sectoral coordination will be required to attain the objectives of the FSNS. The institutional mechanisms for doing so are laid out in this strategy.

The basic motivation for government to work towards ensuring that all Liberians are able to properly and reliably feed themselves and are well nourished is simply that these are moral imperatives. Accordingly, food has long been recognized as a **fundamental human right**, spelled out in key international conventions to which Liberia is a signatory. The government of Liberia is the primary duty-bearer with regard to ensuring that rights to food and proper nutrition are fulfilled. As such government will respect and protect those resources by which Liberians have maintained and pursued their own food security and nutrition goals, it will devise new means to facilitate their efforts, and, when their efforts falter, the state will devise and promote safety nets that provide for their food security.

Entirely consistent with this human rights motive, the FSNS has been developed to contribute to the attainment of several **other priorities of government**.

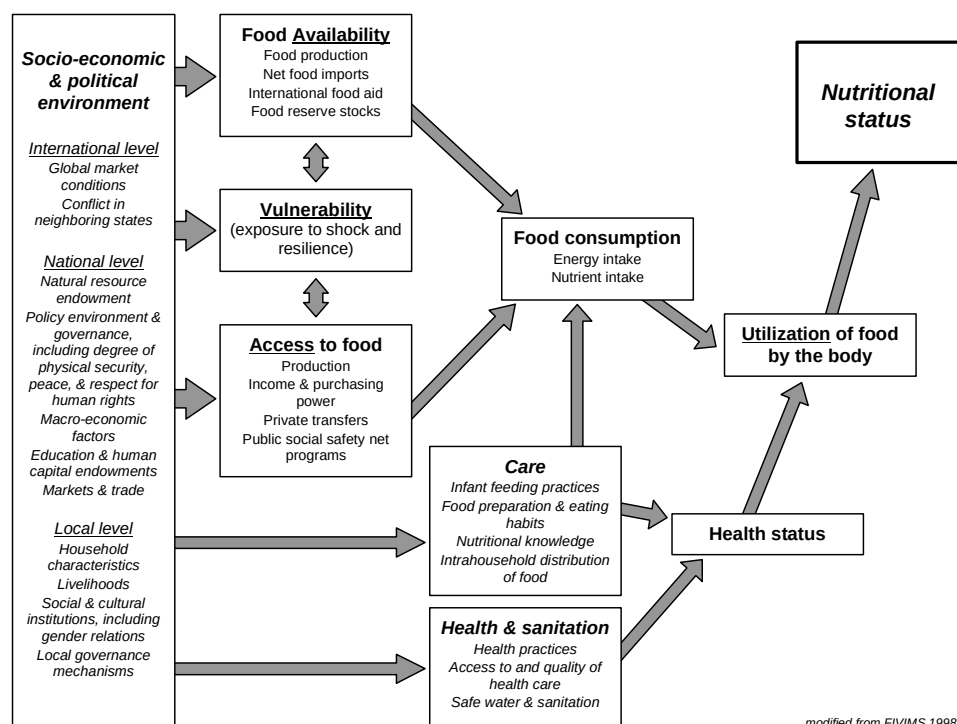
- ♦ It is congruent with the Poverty Reduction Strategy that was formulated in 2007. While the FSNS contributes to or is bolstered by actions under all four pillars of the PRS, Pillar 2 of Revitalizing the Economy is the one to which improved food security and nutrition is most closely linked both as a critical input to activities under this pillar and as an output of them.
- ♦ The FSNS will enable Liberia to make substantial progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 1, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Moreover, food security and improved nutrition also provide an enabling environment for achieving the other goals, while the progressive achievement of those goals will further enhance food security and improved nutrition.
- ♦ At sectoral level, progress is made towards the objectives of policy formulations in agriculture and health by the actions to be taken to achieve FSNS priorities.
- ♦ Finally, strengthening of local decision making and implementation processes in addressing food insecurity and undernutrition under the FSNS reflects government's desire to operate in a participatory, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner.

Conceptual framework of food security and nutrition

In order to draw insights for policy and action to address food insecurity and undernutrition, four separate dimensions of food security can be described. Food **availability**, **access** to food, and **utilization** of food are the three dimensions which reflect the physical flow of food from production to its use by the body for metabolic processes. The fourth dimension of **vulnerability** provides a future-oriented perspective on food security. A **conceptual framework** on the four dimensions and how they interact to contribute to the nutritional status of an individual is depicted in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework also highlights several **complementary determinants** of food security and improved nutritional status. Thus, the socio-economic and political environment is an important determinant of whether sufficient food is available in a society; the degree to which individuals, households, and communities can gain access to that food; and the level of vulnerability to food insecurity. Moreover, the 'food sector' – the agriculture sector, food marketers and importers, and other institutions that make certain food is available – alone cannot ensure food security and improved nutritional status. Adequate food consumption within the household is dependent upon the provision of appropriate care. No one specific

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the four dimensions of food security and how they contribute to nutritional status of an individual.



sector is responsible for ensuring that caregivers provide effective care. Similarly, an individual must be in relatively good health to effectively utilize the nutrients in the food that he or she consumes. This requires at a minimum knowledge of how to maintain proper health, access to good health services, safe drinking water, and adequate sanitation.

In consequence, this FSNS is more than simply an agriculture and food-focused strategy. If food security is to contribute to the improved well-being of all Liberians, the scope of this strategy necessarily extends beyond food alone to nutrition and consideration of how food might be better utilized so that all Liberians can enjoy healthy and active lives.

Priorities for achieving food security and improved nutrition in Liberia

The priority actions that government will lead to ensure that all Liberians are able to have reliable access to the food they need and to utilize that food to achieve good nutritional status are outlined here. Considerably more detail on each is provided in the full strategy document. However, it should be emphasized that the FSNS has been developed within the context of existing government policies and strategies. Consequently, the priorities noted here are not comprehensive. Many of the activities that are critical to the success of this strategy are already addressed in these other policy and strategy documents of government. As such, no new strategic orientations on such issues are provided under the FSNS, as the other policy statements are assumed to appropriately establish the necessary priorities.

To **enhance food availability**, the overall orientation of government will be established through the *formulation of a policy statement on rice self-reliance*. A central element of this statement is that national self-sufficiency in rice production is not called for under the FSNS, since there are significant opportunity costs for Liberian farmers to produce rice when it may be more advantageous for them to use their land and apply their labor to produce other crops, using the income realized to purchase rice, whether local or imported.

However, with regard to food production, the FSNS calls for *exploiting all opportunities for food production by addressing the production constraints farmers face*, including in rice production. While particular attention will be paid to smallholders in this regard, the strategy also calls for increased attention to opportunities for food production from large scale farms. In producing food, several priorities are noted, including *diversification of food production* for both nutritional and economic resiliency reasons, *improving post-harvest processing*, and *safeguarding of communal resources* that are important food sources.

With regard to food made available from outside the country, the FSNS establishes mechanisms to *maintain predictable and stable food imports*, particularly of rice. Sufficient regulation must be in place so that government can gather the information on the condition of the rice import pipeline that it requires for planning. Similarly, the strategy proposes a *strengthening of Liberia's strategic food reserve mechanisms* so that it can reliably maintain rapid access to adequate stocks of rice and other food. Finally, the FSNS sets guidelines by which Liberia can *make appropriate use of international food assistance*, whether in support of development, social protection programs, or to respond to any future food security crises.

To **improve access to food**, the priorities primarily lie within the realms of, first, enhancing opportunities for **employment** and increased incomes and, second, improving **infrastructure** so that Liberians have better physical access to food. Both of these elements are priorities set in the iPRS, so are not considered in detail in the FSNS. The economic growth strategies of the iPRS focusing on employment and infrastructure development are central to raising general levels of access to food. Nevertheless, to increase access to food for all Liberians, three priority action areas under the FSNS are considered – *enhancing access to factors of production*, particularly for agriculture; *improving markets* for both food and non-food produce; and *strengthening safety net programs* to ensure access to food by those in Liberian communities who least able to obtain it through their own efforts. All of these are integrated closely with parallel initiatives of government, including land tenure and labor market reform, efforts to expand employment opportunities, vocational education, provision of agricultural services, enhancing the efficiency of Liberia's markets, and providing for the needs of the most vulnerable.

The priorities established to **promote better food utilization and improved nutritional status** particularly seek to address the enduring high levels of chronic child undernutrition in Liberia. Deficiencies in the provision of necessary complementary inputs to food result in stunted children, high child mortality, and, for many Liberians, shortened lives filled with illness and reduced physical and mental capabilities. Most of these priority actions under the FSNS are the responsibility of agencies that lie outside of the agriculture sector. Consequently, it is particularly in addressing nutrition and food utilization issues that the multi-sectoral character of this strategy is most apparent.

Government will *promote child growth* by dedicating sufficient human and financial resources to carry out effective child growth monitoring and promotion throughout Liberia. Government will ensure that resources are made available so that when nascent undernutrition problems in a child are identified through regular growth monitoring, effective action can be taken to address them. Within the health system a handful of *essential nutrition actions* will be taken consistently at all points of contact with young children and their mothers. These include promoting breastfeeding and proper complementary feeding of infants, providing guidance on the proper nutritional care of sick children, the nutritional requirements of women during pregnancy and lactation, and controlling micronutrient deficiencies. Similarly, dedicated efforts will be made to *save acutely undernourished*

children through providing therapeutic feeding services and to *address the food and nutrition needs of those affected by HIV*.

Improving nutritional caring practices requires a broad range of activities that are problematic to address within the institutional structure of government. This is because care is not really a sectoral issue, but a community and household issue that draws upon resources supplied in part by various sectors. Improving caring practices is primarily about reinforcing beneficial local traditional practices and introducing new nutrition knowledge to caregivers and the general public, while ensuring that caregivers have the resources that they need to provide proper care to those who are dependent upon them. The FSNS identifies a range of activities to improve care that are to be carried out by several different sectors and agencies.

There are a range of other issues that will be addressed to enhance food utilization and improve nutrition. The *industrial fortification of foods* with micronutrients, when feasible, will be supported. Moreover, government will promote the consumption of iodized salt and develop regulations restricting the use of non-iodized salt in Liberia. Similarly, *food standards enforcement* is noted in the FSNS, particularly with regards to the marketing of breast-milk substitutes. *Dietary diversification* efforts will be undertaken to improve the nutritional quality of food consumed by Liberian households, particularly through promoting the consumption of micronutrient-dense foods – fruits, vegetables, and animal-source foods – to complement staple foods. Finally, government will continue its efforts to promote healthy living environments across the country through *increasing access to safe water, sanitation, and proper housing*.

Steps also will be taken to ensure that **enabling factors** for sustainable food security and improved nutrition are in place. *Sufficient human capacity* and expertise both in government and non-governmental organizations in Liberia is needed to implement the strategy – particularly expertise in public health nutrition, in food security and nutrition monitoring, and in food policy analysis. *Research* will be undertaken to improve understanding of the varied ways in which Liberian households acquire and use their food in order to inform the design and implementation of programs through which the objectives of this strategy will be attained. Finally, *community-level actions*, particularly community-driven activities, will be supported to ensure that food insecurity and undernutrition is addressed within households and communities across the country so that undernourished individuals are reached.

Institutional framework for strategy implementation

The FSNS establishes an institutional framework for the coordination of food security and nutrition activities and the monitoring of food insecurity and undernutrition in the country.

A **Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee** is established, which brings together key ministers and two representatives of bilateral and multilateral agencies that are active in food security. The Technical Committee is chaired by the Minister of Agriculture who has the leadership in implementing the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy. Tasks of the Technical Committee are to develop strategic priorities and to plan appropriate responses to crises emerging in the short-term. The Committee will also identify where inter-sectoral coordinated action is needed to address long-term issues related to food insecurity and undernutrition and propose options for taking such action.

All recommendations of the Technical Committee that imply policy actions or have budgetary implications are conveyed to the Cabinet through the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), which was established under the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) framework to coordinate the national reconstruction agenda of the Liberian

Government. Decisions that need urgent action may be directly conveyed to the Cabinet by the Minister that chairs the Technical Committee.

The day-to-day activities of the FSNS will be the responsibility of a **Secretariat** that will be formed as an autonomous unit housed by the Ministry of Agriculture and will directly report to the Technical Committee through its chair. The Secretariat will initially consist of three professional staff: a budget and program analyst and two food security and nutrition analysts. The program and budget analyst will be the Executive Officer of the Secretariat. He/she will assist the Chair of the Technical Committee in its coordination tasks and ensure that a database on food security and food security related projects is maintained, that information from relevant external institutions is supplied on time and that food security and nutrition reports are circulated to all stakeholders.

The **food security and nutrition monitoring** functions under the FSNS will be the responsibility of the food security and nutrition analysts of the secretariat. The analysts will regularly generate information that describes the exposure to risks affecting the food security situation of vulnerable groups and communities across Liberia. In doing so, the analysts must identify accurately who is at risk; where they are located; how many people are affected; what is happening to them and why; how severe the situation is and how it can be expected to evolve over time; what has already been to address the problem by households, communities, government, and international partners; and what additional assistance is needed.

Analysts at the Secretariat will obtain and analyze outcome data from three distinct sources: line ministries' M&E systems; a household surveillance system; a market surveillance system.

The food security and nutrition monitoring system will be dependent on data from line ministries as far as the availability dimension of food security is concerned but will also incorporate information on utilization and context. National institutions from which information will be collected include Ministry of Agriculture (agricultural production), Ministry of Commerce (imports/exports and national stocks), Ministry of Health (facility based growth monitoring data), Independent National Commission on Human Rights (economic, social and cultural rights to food).

The household surveillance system will collect data mostly related to access and utilization. Progress in key food security related outcomes and changes of household economic status will be measured annually. Seasonal trends in consumption and coping mechanisms will be tracked on a quarterly basis, to identify changes in peoples' behaviour that could signal an emerging crisis. Data collection and entry will be done by the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) under a contractual arrangement with the Secretariat. For the periodic collection of data, LISGIS will rely on County Statistic Units (CSU) that will be set up in the framework of County Coordination and Reporting Structures.

A market information system collects data on main food and cash crops in 22 markets across the country including 2 markets in Greater Monrovia, on a bi-weekly basis. Market prices are collected for the main food and cash crops so that terms of trade can also be calculated, and availability of some key items is recorded in order to detect potential scarcity that may signal an incipient crisis. Data from the market information system are analysed in conjunction with those from the household surveillance system with the objective of assessing impact of price fluctuations on household food security status over time.

A **Food Security and Nutrition Stakeholders' Forum** that includes public institutions, the national civil society, international NGOs and bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies that

have a stake in food security is established. The Stakeholders' Forum has consultative purposes only and meets once a year to assess progress on the implementation of the national FSNS

Technical assistance will be sought from donor partners to put in place the skills, mechanisms, and material resources necessary for the Technical Committee and its Secretariat to function effectively and to enable the food security and nutrition monitoring activities to be carried out. Starting 2010, **financial resources** for the operation of the Technical Committee and its Secretariat will be drawn from the budgetary allocation made by government to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Finally, the FSNS has been translated into an **action plan** so the objectives laid out in the strategy can be effectively managed. In establishing this set of actions, responsibility for each has been assigned to the relevant agency and the means for measuring progress toward the desired results established.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction	2
Statement of objectives, target groups, and measures of success.....	3
Scope.....	5
Food security and improved nutrition as development priorities for Liberia.....	7
Conceptual framework of food security and nutrition	11
The food security and nutrition challenges in Liberia	14
<i>Availability</i>	14
<i>Access</i>	15
<i>Utilization and improved nutritional status</i>	17
<i>Vulnerability</i>	18
<i>Capacity</i>	19
Priorities for achieving food security and improved nutrition in Liberia	20
<i>Enhancing food availability</i>	21
<i>Improving access to food</i>	24
<i>Better food utilization and improved nutritional status</i>	27
<i>Reducing vulnerability, improving resilience</i>	31
<i>Enabling factors</i>	32
Institutional framework for strategy implementation	36
<i>Food Security and Nutrition Coordination Council</i>	36
<i>Food security and nutrition monitoring functions</i>	40
Annexes	44
<i>Annex 1 – Developing an action plan for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy</i>	44
<i>Annex 2 – Matrix of priority action areas proposed for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy</i>	47

List of Acronyms

CAAS-Lib	Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector in Liberia
CFSNS	Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey
ENA	Essential nutrition actions
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSNCC	Food Security and Nutrition Coordination Council
FSNS	Food Security and Nutrition Strategy
HIV/AIDS	Human immuno-deficiency virus/Acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome
iPRS	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
LISGIS	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIMAC	National Information Management Center
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The inauguration of a new government for the Republic of Liberia in January 2006 marked a qualitative break with the legacy of violence, divisiveness, human rights abuses, economic mismanagement, and government misrule that characterized the nation since the outbreak of conflict almost two decades earlier. Peace, reconciliation, stability, and development were the ambitions expressed by Liberian voters in electing the new government. In response, government has energetically set about establishing the framework and process through which these ambitions are to be attained and safeguarded.

Central to these efforts is the realization of food security and improved nutrition by the nation as a whole and for all Liberian households. The Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) that was formulated by the new government in 2007 highlights food security as being critical to peace and security, economic revitalization, and poverty reduction:

“Liberians want to build a new nation that is peaceful, secure, and prosperous. ... Consolidating peace, enhancing justice, deepening democracy, ensuring **food security**, promoting human development, and setting the nation on a path for long-term growth and development are the foundations of this vision (p.11).”

Government recognizes that food insecurity is not only a human and economic development problem. The security of the country as a whole is dependent in part upon all Liberians enjoying food security and, by extension, good nutrition. More fundamentally, all Liberians have a right to have access to sufficient safe and nutritious food and to live healthy and productive lives free from hunger. A peaceful future for Liberia is best assured when this right of all Liberians to food and proper nutrition is realized.

Moreover, the economy rests heavily on the food security of the country and the nutritional well-being of its citizens. Food insecurity is implicated in the fact that 75 percent of Liberians live on less than one US dollar per day. Analyses of countries with economies of similar size and condition as that of Liberia show that failure to reduce undernutrition results into tens of millions of dollars in national economic productivity losses annually due to the effects on the physical productivity and cognitive abilities of workers. Thus, while the government has an obligation to all Liberians to assist them in meeting their food needs, it also makes sound economic and political sense for vigorous action to be taken. By ensuring that all have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, government will be laying a strong foundation for a more prosperous, peaceful, and secure nation.

This Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (FSNS) for the government of the Republic of Liberia establishes the activities that government will undertake and the processes that it will put in motion to substantially reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition in the country.

Although recognizing that its implementation will require action across several sectors of government in partnership with the non-governmental and private sectors, government assigned the task of developing a national food security policy to the Ministry of Agriculture. This resultant FSNS was developed in the first half of 2007 through a broadly consultative process led by the Ministry.

The FSNS was developed prior to the drafting of the first full Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) as the master development framework for Liberia. The priorities established in the FSNS are expected to be reflected in many of the priorities of the PRS. Nevertheless, it is recognized that where the priorities established here are not coherent with those to be established in the PRS, appropriate adjustments will be made to this strategy.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES, TARGET GROUPS, AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The **key objectives** of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy are to make certain that food is available and all Liberians are able to have reliable access to the food they need and are able to utilize it to live active and healthy lives. This implies:

- ♦ That enough food is available at all times in all communities of the country.
- ♦ That Liberian households can access this food either directly through their own productive efforts in food crop agriculture; livestock husbandry; hunting, fishing, or the use of other communal resources; or through the market using income earned through sustainable and productive employment. Moreover, if these mechanisms of food access fail, Liberians will be provided access to food through both customary and public safety net programs.
- ♦ Once food is in the household, it can be properly utilized to enhance and maintain the nutritional status of all household members.

Given the centrality of food security to national security, economic development, and poverty reduction and the stated aim of the current administration that it will be accountable to the citizens of Liberia as it governs, an additional key objective of this strategy is to ensure that all Liberians share a common understanding of what food security means. Food security is not a policy choice of government that it can decide to accept or reject, but a right of the citizens of Liberia which the government is obligated to respect, promote, and protect. This strategy establishes how the Liberian government and its leaders will fulfill this obligation by progressively and consistently working to achieve food security for all households and the nation as a whole. Moreover, by making this clear to civil society organizations and ordinary citizens of Liberia the FSNS provides a framework within which government can be held accountable when the priorities established here are ignored. The implementation of this strategy will be guided by principles of human dignity and empowerment, transparency and accountability, broad participation, non-discrimination, and the rule of law.

Although the strategy encompasses the food security and nutritional needs of all Liberians, it prioritizes the needs of food insecure and nutritionally vulnerable groups in society, including the elderly who have little support, female-headed households, orphans, and HIV-affected households. In addressing the needs of nutritionally vulnerable households and in working to safeguard the food security and good nutritional status of others, two demographic groups are **targeted** – infants and children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women. Undernutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, increases the risk of disease and impairs productivity at all stages of life. However, it is particularly harmful during pregnancy and the first years of life which are periods associated with heightened nutritional needs. Undernutrition among women prior to and during pregnancy limits the ability of the fetus to grow. Babies with low birthweight are four times more likely to die in the first week of life from infections. Even moderately undernourished children are at a significantly greater risk of dying from common childhood illnesses like malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, and measles than are their better nourished peers. Deficiencies in Vitamin A, iron, and zinc reduce the ability of children to resist disease. As adults, individuals who were undernourished as children are at greater risk to suffer from chronic disease, including diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Growth failure during this stage of life cannot be corrected fully later, so the consequences of this early undernutrition endure. Moreover, these negative consequences transmit over generations. First, this is because undernourished children later in life will earn less on average than their well nourished peers, experience a lower standard of living, and, therefore, have fewer resources by which to provide their own

children with proper nutrition. Secondly, women who were undernourished as children are more likely to give birth to infants with low birthweight who thus will face the effects of undernutrition diminishing their potential from the day they are born. Good nutrition for pregnant and lactating women and their children can break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition.

Consequently, the **central outcome measures** of whether this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy for Liberia can be judged successful are those that establish whether the food and nutritional needs of young children in Liberia are being met. If these needs are satisfied, prospects are good that all Liberians will be able to enjoy the chance of living active and healthy lives and to contribute to the emergence of a peaceful, secure, and prosperous Liberia. As such, the FSNS adopts child nutritional indicators based on anthropometry – stunting (low height for age), underweight (low weight for age), and wasting (low weight for height) prevalence levels – as key indicators of progress towards the objectives of the strategy.

- ♦ The 2006 Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Surveys (CFSNS) found that 39.2 percent of children aged 6 to 59 months in rural and semi-urban areas were stunted in their growth, while the figure for Monrovia was 27.0 percent. County-level stunting prevalence rates in 2006 ranged from a low of 30 percent in Gbarpolu to a high of 47 percent in Grand Kru. Nine counties show rates of over 40 percent – ‘critical’ according to WHO standards. Generally reflecting the effects of chronic undernutrition in the child, stunting is linked to reduced cognitive development in childhood. When adults, formerly stunted children tend to have lower economic productivity levels and lifetime earnings, thereby affecting their own income possibilities as well as their contribution to economic growth in society in general.
- ♦ Underweight is an indicator of the hunger target of the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) – that of halving the prevalence of underweight children under five years of age in Liberia between 1990 and 2015. Underweight generally reflects the effects of both chronic and recent acute undernutrition in the child. 26.8 percent of children in rural and semi-urban areas were found to be underweight in 2006. County-level underweight prevalence rates ranged from a low of 21 percent in Grand Cape Mount to a high of 34 percent in River Cess. 20.9 percent of children in Monrovia were found to be underweight.
- ♦ Prevalence rates for wasting were found in 2006 to be higher in Monrovia than in rural and semi-urban areas – 7.7 percent in Monrovia versus 6.9 percent elsewhere – both of these rates are high from an international perspective. As wasting generally reflects the effects of recent acute undernutrition in the child, these high rates likely can be attributed to the lingering effects of the physical and social dislocations and turmoil associated with conflict in Liberia in past years.

Of course, these indicators must be assessed in context, particularly in light of trends. While child nutritional indicators integrate the contributions of factors relating to food availability, access, and utilization, they are static indicators. That is, they do not give any indication of what the nutritional status of the children will be in the future. Consequently, the monitoring of trends in the underlying determinants of child nutrition – food security, but also nutritional care, and the provision of health services and a healthy environment – is necessary to assess the likely sustainability of current child nutritional status and any progress achieved under the FSNS.

SCOPE

This strategy has been developed to state the priorities of the Liberian government as it acts to ensure that the nation and its people are food secure and properly nourished. As such, the strategy is more than a broad policy, but less than a fully developed action plan. It identifies a set of public goods and services that several sectors and agencies need to provide in a harmonized manner in order to establish the conditions under which all Liberians can attain food security and be properly nourished. In developing the strategy, it is recognized that it will be implemented in the context of limited resources and that the costs of attaining food security and improved nutrition must be sustainable for the Liberian nation, both economically and environmentally.

The strategy does not define the specific mechanisms by which the sectors and agencies are to provide those public goods and services. A separate action planning activity will need to be done in order to design the activities required to address the priorities stated in this strategy and to put in place the resources needed so that they can be effectively undertaken. Some guidance on how the action plan for this strategy should be developed is presented in an annex starting on page 1.

This strategy does, however, provide more detailed guidance on an institutional framework for the coordination of the implementation of the strategy, with the establishment of a Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee (FSNTC) that has broad cross-sectoral participation from government and partners under the leadership of Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, the mechanisms by which national food security and nutrition monitoring will be carried out are presented. These functions will be carried out by a Secretariat to the Technical Committee, while the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) will be responsible for the collection of data on a contractual basis.

In implementing the strategy, the government will emphasize action at household, community, district (sub-county), and other local levels. The implementation of the FSNS will draw on frameworks that government is putting in place for consultation, prioritization, and planning at district and county levels. Such an approach is necessary to avoid problems of irrelevance to local realities, lack of ownership outside of Monrovia, and limited accountability by political leaders and civil servants for achieving the objectives of the strategy.

Moreover, in planning action to attain these objectives, particular attention will be paid to the stated needs of women. Women in Liberian society, as in most societies, play central roles in ensuring food security and in improving nutrition as food preparers and caregivers and as food producers and marketers. Limits on their access to household resources and on their participation in household decision-making exacerbate food insecurity and undernutrition in many Liberian households. It is also sensitive to the needs of youth, who have important responsibilities for the emergence of a prosperous and peaceful Liberia.

Conflict sensitive planning will be utilized in planning activities under the strategy. The FSNS must contribute to mitigating elements of the structural causes of conflict in Liberia – food insecurity itself, but also unemployment, particularly among Liberian youth, and chronic poverty. It will incorporate the means to anticipate and head-off shocks that might ignite or reignite conflict, such as through spiking food prices or major food shortages. It will support efforts to address structural injustices in the allocation of resources necessary to give access to food. Actions planned under the strategy will pay close attention to whether there is any bias or perceived bias in the targeting of these programs along potentially volatile social dimension, be they ethnic, income, geographic, or religious. A key principle in the

implementation of the strategy will be “to do no harm”. As such, this fits broader principles of transparent planning at local levels and accountability to all Liberian households and communities for attaining the objectives of the FSNS.

The FSNS for Liberia is neither an agricultural nor a rural strategy, in spite of its formulation being led by the Ministry of Agriculture. Its objectives will be achieved through the joint actions of multiple sectors and agencies of government, working with local and international partners, both in civil society and in the private sector. While the agricultural sector is critical to assuring the availability of food in the country and the access of many Liberian households to that food, for all households to attain food security, the participation of several other sectors and agencies is also necessary. Moreover, most of the priorities established in this strategy are as relevant to the food security of urban households and rural households pursuing non-agricultural livelihoods as to those engaged in agriculture.

Though it is multi-sectoral in orientation, the FSNS will not supplant existing policies and strategies that govern the operations of the sectors and agencies implicated in the effort to attain comprehensive food security in Liberia. Rather, it will serve to enhance those policies and strategies, providing additional justification for government and its development partners to devote resources for undertaking activities prioritized under those policies that are critical to attaining food security and improving nutrition. For some sectors and agencies, it is expected that the FSNS will expand the objectives towards which they work and the activities they undertake beyond those featured in their current sectoral policies. Cross-sectoral coordination will be required to attain the objectives of the FSNS, and the mechanisms for doing so are laid out in this strategy. This coordination will include developing and implementing harmonized sectoral strategies for food security and nutrition, putting in place incentives for sectors and other government agencies to work together, and providing a legal framework for the Secretariat to the Technical Committee to enable it to hold government sectors and agencies accountable for providing information on food security and nutrition.

FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AS DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR LIBERIA

Why should food security and improved nutrition be a development priority of the government of Liberia? In this section of the strategy are described several of the important contributions that improved food security and nutrition makes to the attainment of both broad and sectorally-specific objectives of government.

The basic motivation for government to work towards ensuring that all Liberians are able to properly and reliably feed themselves and are well nourished is simply that this is the right thing to do. Food security and improved nutrition are moral imperatives. We all agree that children should be well fed and nourished so that they survive and develop to their full potential and that women should not die in childbirth due to being poorly nourished. Accordingly, food has long been recognized as a fundamental human right, spelled out in key international conventions to which Liberia is a signatory. The government of Liberia is the primary duty-bearer with regard to ensuring that these rights are respected, protected, and promoted.

- ♦ Freedom from hunger was declared a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was first adopted in 1948 by 48 of the member states of the United Nations at that time, including Liberia. “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services (Article 25).” Two elements of this right should be recognized. First, the right to adequate food is fully realized when everyone is food secure. This component should be realized progressively over time as existing resource constraints are overcome. However, a second element is the right to be free from hunger or, alternatively, a minimal right not to starve. This component of the right should be realized for all immediately.
- ♦ As children are those most affected by food insecurity and undernutrition, the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child, ratified by the government of Liberia, states that “States Parties recognize the right of the child to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health” and shall act appropriately “to combat disease and malnutrition” through the provision of adequate nutritious foods, clean drinking water, and healthcare (Article 24).
- ♦ In 2004 Liberia ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. In doing so, the country has accepted an obligation to progressively improve food security and nutrition by the maximal use of available resources, as laid out in Article 11 of the Covenant.

In formulating the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy, the government of Liberia is contributing to the fulfillment of its recognized obligations in this regard.

Building upon its commitment to meet these obligations, the FSNS is congruent with the **Poverty Reduction Strategy** that was formulated in 2007. The PRS is founded upon four pillars. Of these, the economic growth and poverty reduction pillar – Pillar 2 of Revitalizing the Economy – is the one to which improved food security and nutrition is most closely linked both as a critical input to these processes and as an output of them. This is because improved food security and better nutritional status are investments in human capital for increased economic productivity, which is necessary for long-term economic growth. Economic growth, if widespread, brings about sustained improvement in general welfare, i.e. reduced poverty. For most individuals, reduced poverty in turn will result in greater access to

food and the other complementary determinants of improved nutritional status in a self-sustaining virtuous cycle. As such, continued economic growth and poverty reduction in Liberia is unlikely without sustained improvements in food security and aggregate nutritional status. Moreover, going beyond considerations of economic growth and poverty reduction to the technical content of this pillar, food production and marketing are important economic sectors in their own right, providing surpluses for economic growth and revitalization and linking to and strengthening other economic sectors.

Beyond Pillar 2, the other pillars of the PRS are also implicated in enhancing food security and nutrition or, alternatively, are bolstered by enhanced food security and nutrition.

- ♦ Pillar 1 – Enhancing National Security. No country is secure when its children are hungry and undernourished. Food insecurity and undernutrition are sources of marginalization and conflict.
- ♦ Pillar 3 – Strengthening Governance and the Rule of Law – Broad participatory processes will enhance attention to the food and nutrition needs of the many food insecure and undernourished households in Liberia. Moreover, well-nourished citizens are better able to participate actively in national life.
- ♦ Pillar 4 – Rehabilitating Infrastructure and Delivering Basic Services – The state is responsible for delivering key public goods that are necessary to attain food security and to improve nutrition in the country, including roads and health, water & sanitation, and education services. It is unlikely that sustained improvements in food security and nutritional status in Liberia can be achieved without substantial improvement in the provision of physical infrastructure and delivery of basic public services.

The priorities of FSNS have been chosen in part using criteria that are expected to also be used in determining the content of the PRS. Among these criteria is that both the FSNS and the PRS are to enable Liberia to make substantial progress towards the achievement of the **Millennium Development Goals**.

Improved food security and nutrition are a necessary component of making such progress. Food security and improved nutrition are most central to the achievement of Goal 1, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. It was noted earlier that the MDG indicator on the prevalence of underweight children is adopted by this strategy as one of the principal measure by which to evaluate its success. Moreover, going beyond hunger to consider poverty, the mechanism sketched above in discussing Pillar 2 of the PRS shows how food security and proper nutrition also are necessary elements in reducing poverty. However, as shown in Box 1 below, food security and improved nutrition provides an enabling environment for achieving the other seven MDG goals, while the progressive achievement of those goals also will further enhance food security and improved nutrition.

At sectoral level, the agriculture and health sector policy statements also are supportive of public action to address food insecurity and improve nutrition. In agriculture, two policy formulations are relevant – the **Statement of Policy Intent for Agriculture** of October 2006 and the recommendations of the **Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector in Liberia** (CAAS-Lib) in 2007. The Statement of Policy Intent lists first of its five priorities ‘to improve the nutritional status of the population and to ensure stability of access and availability of food’. Moreover, the formulation of a comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Strategy is explicitly noted in the Statement – this FSNS is itself a manifestation of the priorities established in the Statement of Policy Intent. The FSNS also reflects the priorities for the sector as stated in the CAAS-Lib recommendations. In particular, the FSNS

Box 1: Food security and improved nutrition and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

- ◆ Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger – This is the most directly linked of all of the Goals to improved food security and improved nutrition. Poverty and hunger are related. However, the hunger dimension is often forgotten in the poverty debate. Poverty reduction is much slower without targeted efforts against food insecurity and undernutrition. Without efforts to fight hunger, it will not be possible to achieve MDG 1. It also will be difficult to achieve other MDGs, in particular MDG 4, 5 and 6.
- ◆ Goal 2 on ensuring that all children complete a full course of primary education – Household food insecurity and undernutrition often result in parents drawing upon the labor of their children and putting them to work so that they contribute to meeting household food and nutritional needs in the short term rather than sending them to school so that they can be economically more productive in the longer term. Moreover, in addition to earning higher incomes, educated girls tend to have fewer children and those they have are better nourished. Moreover, learning performance by students is enhanced when they are well nourished. If students come to school without having eaten, it results in low concentration and poorer learning abilities.
- ◆ Goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women – Progress towards the attainment of this goal is central to enhancing better nutrition for improved health and well-being in the country. Food production, marketing, and preparation and nutritional care tend to be women's tasks in Liberian households. Women generally use income differently from men with more money spent on food and household items. Increasing the household resources over which women have control has been shown elsewhere to result in improvements in food security and nutrition in the household and population.
- ◆ Goal 4 on reducing child mortality – Undernutrition globally is the single biggest contributor to child mortality. When low birth weight is combined with poor pre-school nutrition, 56 to 60 percent of child deaths are shown to have undernutrition as a key factor. Undernourished children are unable to effectively fight common childhood illnesses. Improved food security, when coupled with improved access to health care, water, and sanitation, and improved care of children, is a necessary element in reducing the number of children who die each year in Liberia.
- ◆ Goal 5 of reducing maternal mortality – By improving the quality of women's diets, improved food security and nutrition can benefit maternal health directly, particularly their reproductive health. Adequate consumption of micronutrients is particularly important for women – for example, iron-deficiency anemia is especially damaging in the months around childbirth and is an important cause of maternal deaths. Particularly through enriching the quality of diets, improved food security is an important mechanism to improve maternal health.
- ◆ Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases – Food security and proper nutrition reduces the burden of these diseases, as improved diet and better care enhance the effectiveness of the immune system to withstand HIV and tuberculosis, most notably, or slow the progression of the diseases. Moreover, a more dynamic food sector results when these health barriers to increased labor productivity are removed.
- ◆ Goal 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability – Particularly in the context of Liberian food systems, safeguarding natural resources is critical to sustainable food security. Many of the nutrient-dense foods eaten by large numbers of Liberians come from the forests and waterways of the country – bushmeat and fish, in particular. In addition, much of the formal employment opportunities through which many households assure their access to food and better nutrition are linked to the exploitation of Liberia's natural resources, which must be done in a sustainable manner if these households are to enjoy long-term food security. Moreover, Goal 7 also is concerned with access to safe water and sanitation and proper housing, all of which are key underlying determinants with food security of whether individuals enjoy good nutritional status and the potential of a healthy and active life.
- ◆ Finally, Goal 8 on partnership for development – In the national context of Liberia, working towards food security and enhanced nutrition in Liberia will strengthen partnerships for broader development. Sustainable food security and improved nutrition can only be achieved through actions undertaken by several sectors – agriculture, health, education, commerce, etc. – and at multiple levels – households, community, district, county, and national. Coordination and harmonization of these activities is needed.

provides added impetus to the achievement of the vision expressed in the CAAS-Lib of a transformed Liberian agriculture in which there is broad-based farmer participation in integrated, productivity-driven cash and food crop systems. Ensuring food security is noted in the CAAS-Lib as a core function of the agricultural sector. As such, a key orientation of the document is 'reducing the real cost of food', an effort that to be sustainable, it is noted, will include not only increased food production, but also improving the competitiveness and

efficiency of agricultural marketing systems, providing improved technologies to farmers, and strengthening economic governance.

The health sector has responsibility for the provision of nutrition services through both clinical and public health interventions. As such, the **National Health Policy and Plan** (2007-2011) recognizes the importance of food security and nutrition to its efforts in addressing the many health challenges that Liberians face. The cornerstone of the plan is the provision of a Basic Package of Health Services to each and every Liberian. Within these services are a range of food utilization and nutrition related services, including child growth monitoring and promotion, micronutrient supplementation, and interventions to improve child survival. The policy places a priority on building capacity in nutrition through training. Finally, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare notes two particular target groups for its efforts – children and mothers. As such, the efforts prioritized in the health sector policies match those of this strategy and the efforts undertaken under each can be expected jointly to result in improved nutrition and health for all Liberians.

Finally, the strengthening of local democratic decision making and implementation processes in addressing food insecurity and undernutrition is an opportunity for the national government to apply its commitment to devolve and decentralize planning and government functions. Key elements of efforts to expand political participation include ensuring that women, youth, and those historically excluded from political decision making participate and take action so that their particular needs are addressed. The implementation of the FSNS will contribute to a deepening of these efforts. Such local policy and planning processes can serve to enhance the food security and nutritional well-being of local households through providing local officials and agencies with the direction, authority, and resources that they need to meet their responsibilities in this regard. In particular, this includes supporting community-driven development activities to enhance food security and nutrition. Moreover, as noted earlier, the FSNS has been developed on the expectation that the priorities established here will best be achieved within a context whereby government and its leaders at all levels are held accountable by the households and communities that they serve for producing the results towards which this strategy aims.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

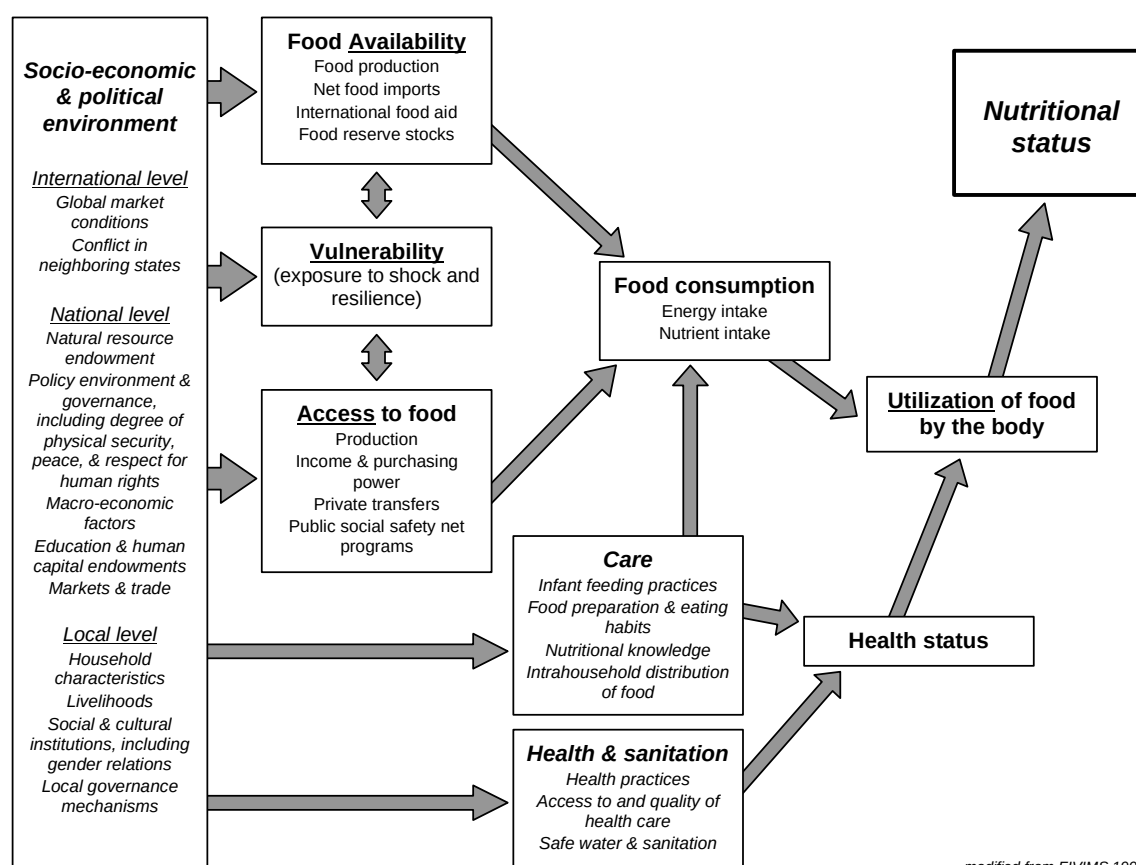
The definition of food security that is used for this strategy is that formulated for the World Food Summit in 1996:

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

In order to draw insights for policy and action to address food insecurity and undernutrition, four separate dimensions of food security can be described. Food availability, access to food, and utilization of food are the three dimensions which reflect the physical flow of food from production to its use by the body for metabolic processes. The fourth dimension of vulnerability provides a future-oriented perspective on food security. A conceptual framework on the four dimensions and on how they interact to contribute to the nutritional status of an individual is depicted in Figure 1. More detail is provided here.

- ♦ **Availability** – For a household or nation to be food secure, there must be sufficient quantities of food available. Such food can be supplied through household production, other domestic food production, commercial imports, or through the provision of international food aid. Moreover, the food available should be sufficiently diverse to provide for balanced diets.
- ♦ **Access** – Food availability does not imply that all will have access to that food. Access to food is only obtained when households and individuals have the resources necessary to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious diet. These resources may

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the four dimensions of food security and how they contribute to nutritional status of an individual.



include access to resources for food production through agriculture, hunting, or fishing; income to enable purchase of food on the market; or entitlements to non-commercial public or private food sources. For many Liberian households, access to food is crucially dependent on their purchasing power which is a function of their income, as well as the prices they face for food. Food prices will be determined in part by the efficiency of local food markets.

- ♦ Utilization – When a household or individual has access to sufficient food, his or her food consumption needs can be met. However, food security is not simply to ensure adequate food consumption. Rather it is desired so that the food consumed can contribute to achieving and maintaining the good nutritional status needed so that one can live a healthy and active life. Consequently, the utilization that one's body makes of the food consumed is a key dimension of food security. Effective food utilization goes well beyond access to food to also require that an individual be able to effectively utilize the energy and nutrients in the food consumed. He or she must be in good health, which is achieved through access to health services, living in a sanitary environment with access to clean water and, for children especially, that they are provided knowledgeable care. **Food security** with adequate **care** and access to essential **health services** and a **healthy environment** are the underlying determinants of good nutrition necessary for children to grow and thrive and for adults to maintain health.
- ♦ Vulnerability – This dimension highlights the risks to and variability in food security for an individual, household, community, or nation. There are a broad range of factors that can put people and communities at risk of losing access to food – poor agricultural production, loss of employment and other income, market failures, and so on. The degree of vulnerability to food insecurity is determined by the extent of exposure of individuals, households, communities, or the nation as a whole to such negative shocks to their food systems and their ability to cope with and withstand these shocks. Moreover, although not highlighted in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, the complementary underlying determinants of good nutrition – adequate care and access to essential health services and a healthy environment – also are subject to shock and variability in the degree to which they can be adequately provided. Vulnerability is addressed by developing means to avert or mitigate all such shocks – that is, by building resilience.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 highlights several complementary determinants of food security and improved nutritional status. First, the socio-economic and political environment is an important determinant of whether sufficient food is available in a society, the degree to which individuals, households, and communities can gain access to that food, and the level of vulnerability to food insecurity. Food security and, in particular, nutritional status are defined at the level of the individual even though they are brought about by a combination of individual, household, community, national, and even international factors. Different factors are important at different scales. International prices for the commodities that Liberia produces and for the rice it imports are critical determinants of food availability and access to that food for many Liberian households. Several national level factors within the socio-economic and political environment in Liberia are critical, including the degree to which peace can be maintained, commitments to ensuring human rights are respected, and sufficient human capacity can be built and kept in place. Moreover, the whole range of issues related to macroeconomic management, the dynamism of the national economy, and the efficiency with which markets operate and trade is conducted are critical to improved food security and nutrition. A stable macroeconomy is necessary to reduce uncertainty and risk

and boost consumer and investor confidence. Macroeconomic management instruments, including fiscal, monetary, exchange rate, and labor market policies, all contribute to shaping the economic incentives encountered by producers and consumers that lead to actions that result in food security and nutrition outcomes at national, household and individual levels. These and other broad issues, although not directly linked to the key determinants of food security and improved nutrition, necessarily must be supportive if food security and improved nutrition for Liberian households is to be achieved and sustained.

Secondly, the ‘food sector’ – the agriculture sector, food marketers and importers, and other institutions that make certain food is available – alone cannot ensure food security and improved nutritional status. Adequate food consumption within the household is dependent upon the provision of appropriate care within the household. No one specific sector is responsible for ensuring that caregivers provide effective care, but the education and health sectors, among others, make important contributions in this regard. Similarly, complementary inputs from the health and sanitation sectors are required for individuals to be able to meet their dietary needs. An individual must be in relatively good health to effectively utilize the nutrients in the food that he or she consumes. This requires at a minimum knowledge of how to maintain proper health within the household, access to good health services, safe drinking water, and adequate sanitation.

In consequence, this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy is more than simply an agriculture and food focused strategy. Indeed, there is considerable evidence in Liberia that even under conditions of relatively good food availability and access, many children, in particular, are unable to utilize the food they consume effectively and remain malnourished. If food security is to contribute to the improved well-being of all Liberians, the scope of this strategy necessarily extends beyond food alone to nutrition and consideration of how food might be better utilized so that all Liberians can enjoy healthy and active lives.

THE FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION CHALLENGES IN LIBERIA

Key indicators of success for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy are the prevalence in Liberia of stunted, underweight, and wasted children less than five years of age. Current levels for these statistics were noted earlier. If the needs of all Liberians for food security and proper nutrition are satisfied, all Liberian children will be adequately fed, growing well, and with good prospects for enjoying active and healthy lives and contributing to a stronger, more productive, and prosperous Liberia. These statistics provide a good indication of how close Liberia is to achieving this ambition.

The challenges that Liberians face in terms of their food security and nutrition are large, but are by no means insurmountable. This strategy has been formulated to address these challenges. This section provides an empirical understanding of the problems of food insecurity and undernutrition in the country. The four dimensions of food security guide the presentation.

Availability

Food availability in Liberia is relatively good. This is due primarily to relatively open markets to food imports and large allocations of international food assistance to the country in recent years. However, yields of staple crops, particularly upland and lowland rice and cassava, are low relative to their potential and there is considerable room for improving the productivity of food crops in the country.

The annual total staple food requirement for Liberia, expressed in terms of rice, is about 350 thousand metric tons of milled rice. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry reports total rice imports of 172 thousand tons in 2006, up from 136 thousand tons in 2005. While 95 percent of the rice needs of urban households in Liberia are met through imported rice, significant quantities of imported rice also are consumed by rural Liberians.

Food aid donations for Liberia in 2006 totaled 55,500 tons. These commodities generally consist of bulgur wheat, maize-soy blend flour, pulses, vegetable oil and small quantities of sugar, salt, meat, and fish. Very little of it is rice. While this food is distributed in a targeted fashion, overall it makes an important contribution to the food that is available to Liberian households – 55,500 tons represents between seven and eleven percent of the minimum dietary energy needs for the entire population of Liberia.

Food crop production levels of Liberian farmers are low. Globally, average rice yields in recent years have been about 3,900 kg paddy/ha, while in sub-Saharan Africa yields recently have averaged about 1,500 kg/ha. There are no recent estimates of rice yields in Liberia drawn from field evaluations. The average 2001 rice yield estimate from the Ministry of Agriculture was 1,400 kg/ha. However due to problems of insufficient seed and tools, many lowland rice fields being in need of rehabilitation after several years of disuse, and other disruptions associated with refugee resettlement, the 2006 Crop and Food Security Assessment for Liberia estimated average rice yields to be about 400 kg/ha, with total production amounting to only 85 thousand metric tons after milling.

The same assessment provided more encouraging estimates of cassava production at 635 thousand metric tons. This corresponds to a rice equivalent of 133 thousand metric tons. While important for food availability in the country, given the centrality of rice to Liberian diets and culture, cassava is not necessarily an adequate substitute for rice. The definition of food security used in this strategy requires that “food preferences” be considered.

Beyond food crops, livestock production was decimated during the civil war as animals were stolen. Many areas of the country are only now beginning to rebuild their flocks of

poultry and herds of goats, sheep, and pigs, in particular. Similarly, Liberia's fish are relatively underexploited – recent estimates are that less than ten percent of the annual maximum sustainable catch in Liberia's rivers and ocean fishery is caught.

Some efforts are underway to raise food productivity levels in Liberia. These include large distributions of rice seed and agricultural tools, particularly to communities in which formerly displaced households have recently resettled. Livestock herd reconstitution efforts are underway, as is support to fisheries development. As the focus of much assistance to the country switches from an emergency to a development orientation, agricultural livelihood strengthening programs are being established by a broad range of local and international NGOs.

Access

Households can access food through purchases, own production, or food aid to obtain sufficient and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences. Food consumption frequency and dietary diversity are good proxy indicators to assess the access dimension of food security. Dietary diversity is highly correlated with household income, calorie and protein adequacy, birth weight and child nutrition status, and improved hemoglobin concentration. Based on the dietary diversity measure, the CFSNS estimated that 50 percent of rural/semi-urban households have poor or borderline diets, while only 15 percent have well balanced diets. In Lofa, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Grand Kru and Maryland counties, more than 65 percent of households have poor or borderline diets. In some regions, particularly in the north-west, the civil war and its aftermath has caused transitory food shortages, while in the south-east such problems are more chronic, for which the underlying causes include low agricultural productivity, income poverty, and limited access to markets. Urban households in Monrovia have much better access to food – here only 14 percent have poor or borderline diets, while 66 percent have good diets. These results imply that any strategies towards improved access to food should primarily focus on the rural sector.

Traditionally, access to food for many Liberian farmers is assured through the production of food from their own fields, however the rural and semi-urban CFSNS found that at the time of the survey (March and April 2006, towards the end of the dry season), only 17 percent of households reported that all or part of the rice that they consumed came from their own production while 87 percent had purchased all or some of their rice during the recall period. Forty-six percent of households reported that they consumed cassava from their own production, while 52 percent consumed cassava that was purchased on the market. For Monrovia households, own production is close to zero, and nearly all of the rice, cassava and vegetables consumed is purchased. Efficient food-marketing systems clearly are the principal pillar of urban food security in Liberia. However, these results indicate that in post-war Liberia, most households – not only urban but also rural households – are highly dependent on a functioning market system, particularly during the agricultural lean season.

The market network in Liberia is sparse, particularly inland, reflecting low population densities and difficult transport and communication conditions. The rural and semi-urban CFSNS results show that the average travel time to market for all surveyed households was 2.5 hours. In Gbarpolu county, average time to market was nearly 6 hours. In consequence, simple physical access to food in the market is problematic for many Liberian households – particularly in the geographically more isolated counties – Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, River Gee, Grand Kru, and River Cess.

Economic access to that food is of equal concern. This is a function of the income households earn and the food prices they must pay. Income is dependent upon employment. The PRS rightly highlights unemployment as a critical security issue for the nation. While this primarily refers to the threat to national security and the risk of conflict resulting from the despair and political tensions that are likely to result from so many people unable to attain their livelihoods, unemployment is also a key determinant of household food insecurity in the country. Given the history of economic development that resulted in the establishment of large commercial concerns that dominate the national economy, Liberians have been somewhat more involved in wage labor employment for their livelihoods than residents of neighboring countries. Many Liberians no longer have access to agricultural land or the skills necessary to produce their own food. They require secure and sufficiently remunerative wage employment or business income to meet the food and other nutritional needs of their households. Moreover, this is important in both rural and urban areas. One finds diverse livelihood strategies in rural areas. The CFSNS survey of households in rural and semi-urban areas found food crop production to be the primary income source for only 15 percent of surveyed households. The other households specialized in largely commercial activities such as rubber tapping, palm oil processing, petty trade, contract labor, or charcoal production, as well as a wide range of secondary commercial activities. In the Monrovia CFSNS survey, households with poor food consumption were shown disproportionately to have an unemployed household head. Over 60 percent of unemployed adults aged 25 to 54 years – about 28 percent of all adults in this age range – reported that they were unemployed simply because no work was available.

Market prices – both the price paid for food and the price that producers receive when they bring products for sale at the market – also are key factors in access to food. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry imposes price ceilings on imported rice at each stage of the marketing chain – importers, suppliers, and marketers. These price ceilings are calculated based on the cost of importation. Prices for other foods are unregulated. For the principal cash crops, producer prices are dependent upon world market prices and the availability of local buyers. For rubber, local prices currently are high, reflecting high world prices and extensive buying networks in the rubber-producing areas of the country. However, for cocoa and coffee, the cash crops most widely grown by smallholders, regardless of the level of world prices, local farmers currently earn little from their crops due to insufficient numbers of buyers in local markets. Anecdotally, the reaction of many smallholder farmers to these poor market conditions appears to be that they are changing their cash crop mix rather than increasing rice production. Possibly because of the price ceilings on imported rice, producer prices for rice are insufficiently attractive for farmers to engage in commercial production of the crop. Other crops of commercial interest include oil palm and, for the Monrovia market, vegetables.

Finally, access to food in Liberia is also provided through public programs that include food distribution as part of the benefits received. As part of the emergency response following the end of the war in 2003, a wide range of such programs were established and implemented primarily by international and local NGOs, often with the assistance of UN agencies. Several of these continue, including the Emergency School Feeding program in virtually all primary schools in the country, the Food Security for Local Initiatives public works program, supplementary feeding as part of child growth monitoring and promotion activities, and the allocation of food rations to returning households as part of reintegration programs. Thirty-six percent of households surveyed in the rural and semi-urban CFSNS in early 2006 reported receiving some food assistance from such programs, primarily through the school feeding program. While it is to be expected that several of these programs will be

phased out in the near future, there is scope for the continuation of others in the medium-term, in particular the school feeding and food or cash for work programmes, insofar as such programs contribute towards consolidating social and economic recovery in the country. For example, a large rural development program is now starting that relies in part on food aid from donors for its operational resources. This food is used both by monetizing it through sale on local markets and as direct support to beneficiary communities and households.

Utilization and improved nutritional status

The utilization dimension of food security takes into account the availability of and access to food, but also reflects caring practice and health related complementary inputs. The anthropometric indicators that are the key outcome measures for this strategy integrate these factors as measures of nutritional status.

Trends in the levels of the child undernutrition measures in Liberia have been relatively constant through the years. Although the measures used are not exactly comparable, the 1976 Liberia National Nutrition Survey found that 24 percent of children under 5 years of age were underweight. The Liberia National Nutrition Survey of 1999-2000 similarly found 26.4 percent of children under 5 years of age to be underweight, 39.4 percent were stunted in their growth, and 5.9 percent were wasted and acutely undernourished, not significantly different from the figures found in the 2006 rural and semi-urban CFSNS of 26.8, 39.2, and 6.9 percent, respectively. Although levels of acute undernutrition (child wasting) have risen somewhat in recent years as might be expected with the economic and physical dislocations associated with the successive rounds of conflict in the country, the continuing high levels of chronic child undernutrition (child stunting) that predate the conflict period suggest that there are enduring causes accounting for these levels.

Several factors related to health and care can be considered as potential determinants of the high levels of chronic undernutrition found in Liberia.

- ♦ Educational attainment levels of adult women provide a proxy measure for the knowledge of proper nutritional and health care practices by mothers. Sixty-two percent of adult women in rural and semi-urban areas of Liberia were found by the CFSNS to have had no formal education. Moreover, for most who attended school, few attended for more than a few years. Only 12 percent of women in rural and semi-urban areas reported completing elementary school. In Monrovia, 44 percent of women reported having done so.
- ♦ Breastfeeding is the principal source of nutrition for infants in Liberia, as it should be. However, infant feeding practices can be improved. Exclusive breastfeeding should be practiced until the child is 6 months of age. The CFSNS found that only 43 percent of infants aged 0 to 4 months in rural and semi-urban households were exclusively breastfed in the 24 hours prior to the survey interview, while this number drops to 22 percent for infants 4 to 6 months of age. The rates for urban infants are 37 and 31 percent, respectively. The important benefits to health and nutrition of breastfeeding are compromised by this common early introduction of other food and drink.
- ♦ Access to health services similarly is important to ensuring that children are well nourished. Ninety percent of communities in Liberia do not have a health facility. In rural Liberia, on average it takes residents of communities that do not have a health clinic nearly three hours to reach the nearest clinic.

- ♦ Sixty-eight percent of households surveyed in the rural and semi-urban CFSNS did not have access to safe drinking water. In Monrovia, this figure falls to 22 percent.
- ♦ In terms of sanitation, few rural households have any sanitation facilities – only 24 percent of households surveyed had access to any toilet facility. In Monrovia, 79 percent of households use some sort of toilet.

Moreover, the quality of the diets consumed is also an important determinant of nutritional status. Evidence from the CFSNS surveys indicates that many Liberian households, although not all by any means, have relatively diverse diets. However there is evidence of significant levels of micronutrient deficiencies in the country. The National Micronutrient Survey in 1999 found iron-deficiency anemia in 87 percent of children aged 6 to 35 months, 58 percent of non-pregnant women aged 14 to 49 years, and 62 percent of pregnant women. While diet quality is one factor accounting for these levels, other factors also are likely to be involved, including high parasite loads, most notably malaria and hookworm. Vitamin A deficiency was found to affect 53 percent of children aged 6 to 35 months, although its prevalence among adults is much lower.

Vulnerability

Many sources of vulnerability to loss of availability of food or access to food can be identified, including higher levels of pest infestation and damage in farmers' fields or in their stored produce, increased incidence of disease, or localized droughts and floods. However, the two principal sources of vulnerability linked to food security are conflict and market-related shocks. Both require close monitoring.

Certainly the central source of vulnerability in Liberia over the past two decades lies in political instability and conflict. Through the displacement of households and the breakdown in markets and in the provision of social services it causes, not only does conflict restrict availability of and access to food, it also affects access to the complementary goods and services needed to properly utilize any food consumed – health services, education, water and sanitation, and so on. Moreover, food insecurity itself is arguably an underlying source of conflict within the country, motivating conflict over access to the resources needed to ensure access to sufficient food. Although recent trends are encouraging, the risks of conflict and a breakdown in effective government will remain continuing priority concerns for the nation.

Secondly, market related shocks are of concern for the food security of Liberian households. Global changes in prices for the commodities that Liberia produces – rubber, iron ore, cocoa, palm oil, coffee, and so on – are likely to have a direct effect on the income levels and, hence, access to food of households that are dependent for their income upon their production. Similarly, changes in the prices of global commodities that Liberia consumes – rice and petroleum, most notably – will have equally severe consequences. Increasing demand globally for food crops – particularly increased demand for the production of biofuels – likely will result in increased prices for imported rice in the country in coming years. Moreover, the supply chain for imported rice to Liberia is relatively thin and concentrated, since most imported rice comes from overseas, with virtually none from the region. With only a handful of rice importers historically supplying the country, this supply chain has been subject to manipulation in the past. Liberia's history demonstrates the considerable political and economic risks associated with any sharp rises in the price of rice.

Capacity

While the food security and nutrition challenges considered here have been disaggregated using the four dimensions of food security discussed earlier, one other challenge should be highlighted – the limited human capacity in the country to address these challenges. One of the legacies of the long civil war in Liberia is that many experienced and highly trained Liberians left the country to build lives elsewhere. Many of these migrants were those individuals who could have been expected to take responsibility for ensuring that effective action is taken within the framework of this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy. Their skills will need to be replaced.

An area related to food security and nutrition in which there are key gaps in the numbers of trained individuals available is agricultural research and extension. Most of the county-level work in agriculture is currently being done by local and international NGOs with only limited contributions by Ministry of Agriculture staff, since their numbers are extremely few. Similarly, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has virtually no professional staff to support the public health and primary health care efforts related to nutrition made by their field staff. Few teachers and other academics have expertise in food security and nutrition, so training programs at all levels give only cursory attention to ensuring that skills are developed to contribute to meeting the food and nutrition needs of Liberians. Lastly, there is considerable need to build capacities for monitoring of food security in the country, particularly in ensuring that early warning can be provided of looming crises of whatever sort.

PRIORITIES FOR ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION IN LIBERIA

In this section are presented the priority actions that government will lead to make certain that all Liberians are able to have reliable access to the food they need and to utilize that food to achieve a good nutritional status necessary to live active and healthy lives. In doing so, it bears repeating that the FSNS has been developed within the context of existing policies and strategies that govern the operations of the sectors and agencies implicated in these efforts. Consequently, the priorities noted here are not comprehensive. Much of the activities on, for example, enhancing agricultural production or increasing employment opportunities that are critical to the success of this strategy are already addressed in other policy and strategy documents of government. As such, no new strategic orientations on these issues are provided here as existing policy statements are assumed to be appropriate for the purposes of this strategy.

The criteria used to identify short-term priority activities are the following:

- ♦ Consolidate gains and avoid backsliding in national and county-level food security status. Any gains in food security and nutritional status made during the emergency response period must be maintained.
- ♦ Demonstrate progress by addressing high profile food insecurity and undernutrition problems that are of widespread concern in Liberian households. Such progress and quick successes in addressing these problems are needed to give legitimacy and credibility to the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy.
- ♦ Take action to effectively address any acute food insecurity and undernutrition related suffering – child wasting, in particular.
- ♦ Adopt a general preference for undertaking activities that lead to multiple food security outputs across the four dimensions of the conceptual framework. For instance, expanding production and marketing of nutritious vegetables increases national food availability, broadens access to food through both direct consumption and sales income, and improves nutritional well-being through diversifying diets.

In the medium-term one to four years after the strategy is accepted by government, considerable attention will be paid to putting in place and strengthening the institutional framework for the coordination of food security and nutrition activities and the monitoring of food insecurity and undernutrition in the country. A key element of these efforts will be developing the necessary capacity to undertake these functions.

In the long term of five years or more, the focus of activities under the strategy will be on making consistent progress towards the sustainable achievement of the food security and nutrition goals set in the strategy and in other policies and action plans of the Liberian government. An important feature of the continuing responsibilities of the Food Security and Nutrition Stakeholders' Forum will be the regular evaluation of the effectiveness of past efforts undertaken under the strategy and the recommendation of modifications to programs and projects in light of these evaluations.

A summary matrix of the priority action areas proposed in this section of the FSNS is presented in an annex starting on page 47. This matrix provides a preliminary assessment for each action of what agencies would be responsible, within what time horizon, and what sort of capacity constraints would need to be addressed.

Enhancing food availability

The priorities for increasing the availability of food and the stability of food supplies in Liberia are categorized by source – national food production, food imports, and food aid – with an additional element relating to ensuring that the country has a strategic reserve of grain or other staple foods. However, first the overall orientation of these activities is stated.

Formulate policy statement on rice self-reliance. While the agriculture sector is developing policies and action plans for enhancing broad agricultural production, the interest of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy is with food production in Liberia – both for consumption by the households that produce it and for distribution through the market. As such, the resources dedicated to agricultural research and extension efforts to enhance food and livestock production is a necessary element of the path to sustainable food security. In particular, increased production of rice is of strategic benefit for the country for national security reasons (disruptions to import supplies), economic reasons (opportunity costs of foreign exchange expenditures for rice imports), and as a reflection of the cultural centrality of rice to most Liberian societies. Moreover, the CAAS-Lib states clearly that Liberia has an international comparative advantage in the production of lowland rice. Continuing efforts to exploit this advantage are important to the food security of the nation.

However, it must be made clear that national self-sufficiency in rice production is not called for under this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy. There are significant opportunity costs for Liberian farmers to produce rice when it may be more advantageous for them to use their land and apply their labor to produce other crops, using the income realized from marketing those crops to purchase rice, whether local or imported. Rather than *rice self-sufficiency*, the aim should be *rice self-reliance* by which Liberia acquires the rice it needs in an efficient and socially justifiable manner. Doing so requires attention to increasing national production of rice, while at the same time ensuring that importation of rice occurs in a transparent and considered manner that safeguards national interests. With proper oversight and attention to the comparative economic advantages that Liberia enjoys, rice imports are not necessarily damaging to the nation's interests. A policy statement on government's strategic approach to ensuring rice availability will be prepared and widely disseminated. It is important that the policy stance of government in this regard is widely understood by farmers, by rice traders, and by rice consumers throughout the country.

Production

Exploit all opportunities for food production, address production constraints. Most of the rice produced in Liberia comes from smallholder fields. In order to realize improvements in general welfare and poverty reduction from a more dynamic smallholder farming sector, the food security of the nation should increasingly rely on smallholder production. However, this strategy also calls for increased attention to opportunities for rice production from large scale agricultural enterprises which currently specialize in tree crops. In particular, assessments should be made of what institutional and contractual mechanisms and incentives are required to promote lowland rice production from swamplands within these large concessions, without compromising their production of tree crops.

There are a range of agronomic issues that constrain food production in the country, but which can be surmounted. Most of these are already covered in strategy documents of the Ministry of Agriculture, but are also emphasized here. Seed supply often limits production of crops, most notably rice. An effective seed system is a necessary element for increasing agricultural production in the country. Similarly, increased availability of poultry, goats, sheep, and pigs is needed. In-field and post-harvest losses sharply reduce the amount of food crops that is available for consumption. Loss of crops due to animal pests attacking fields

was the economic shock most commonly reported by households surveyed in the 2006 CFSNS. High levels of wastage of food in storage require increased attention to improved storage and preservation methods. Addressing these production and storage constraints through improved technologies, increased access to credit to enable capital investments in food production and storage, and effective agricultural support institutions – including training, extension, research, and cooperatives – is critical to achieving higher levels of food availability from local production.

Improve post-harvest processing. Food availability can be enhanced through increased attention to post-harvest processing. For example, small-scale mechanized rice milling provided by private entrepreneurs, in particular, will enhance market demand for country rice. Currently, producers bringing rice to the market or consumers buying it are not very willing to process rice by hand. Establishment of local rice mills should result in more local rice on the market and reduce demand for milled imported rice. Other approaches to improving processing and reducing food wastage in storage will be explored.

Diversify food produced. Explicit attention will be paid under this strategy to diversification in the food produced in Liberia, including of vegetables, fruits, and livestock. The advantages of doing so are two-fold. First, increased diet diversity is associated with improve micronutrient intake, reducing micronutrient deficiency diseases. Secondly, a more diversified food system is more resilient to shocks, particularly those linked to epidemic crop and livestock diseases or pest infestations.

Safeguard communal property resources. Finally, local production of food is enhanced through the strategic protection of key communal property resources that are important for food security – forests, rivers, the ocean, and other ecosystems that are important for the production of wild food plants, bushmeat, and fish. As government formulates and administers management mechanisms for these natural resources, protection of their role in contributing to the food security of the communities in their environs and to the nation as a whole will be a primary objective.

Food imports

Maintain predictable and stable food imports. Commercial food imports play a critically important role for Liberia's food security, both as a source of strategically important foods and as a means to widen the nutritional value of the diet. Rice is the most strategic of these imported foods. The nation must maintain a predictable rice import pipeline. To do so, sufficient regulation must be in place so that government can gather the information on the condition of the pipeline that it requires for planning purposes. Consequently, a fully unregulated rice importation regime is not in the interests of the country. Government will ensure that it is sufficiently well informed on the intentions of importers of rice and will hold the authority to intervene to ensure that rice importation channels operate reliably.

An additional justification for regulation on rice importation is the centrality of the market for access to food, particularly in Monrovia and other urban centers. The effect of rapid rises in food prices are felt more keenly in the cities and towns, with immediate political ramifications. Regulations to minimize sharp changes in food prices and mechanisms to temporarily buffer such changes, such as price stabilization funds, are critical to the welfare of urban households in Liberia.

Although the mechanisms that have been put in place by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to regulate the importation of rice are necessary, they should be assessed regularly to determine whether they contribute to increased food availability in the country. However, it is less clear that the food security of the country is assured with the regulations currently

applied to the marketing of imported rice once it is distributed to wholesalers and retailers. Of particular concern is whether the price ceilings imposed on imported rice at county and district markets create production disincentives for rice producers that limit total national rice production. Although there are important social benefits that results from low rice prices in Liberia, particularly for those citizens who rely on the market for all of their food, the food security of all Liberians may be enhanced and made more sustainable if rice prices are relaxed judiciously to motivate increased production. Such a decision by government will be based upon close consideration of all available evidence and in consultation with both rice producers and consumers.

While rice is the most important food import, it is not the only food imported into Liberia. Of note are pulses and condiments imported from Liberia's neighbors. While Liberian farmers are encouraged to increase their production of these foods and to exploit all market opportunities open to them, given the importance of these foods to micronutrient nutrition, in particular, the Liberian government will not limit their importation from neighboring states. Moreover, this stance is in conformity with Liberia's undertakings as a member of the Economic Community of West African States.

Strategic food reserve

Maintaining availability of food under all circumstances in Liberia, as in any country, must be planned. A key element of such planning in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa is the establishment of a strategic reserve of staple foods. Liberia has ready access to food import markets and enjoys a relatively benign and predictable agro-climate. Consequently, many of the factors that motivate the creation of such reserves in other countries, such as droughts and other weather-related calamities and poor access to sources of imported food, do not apply to Liberia.

Strengthen strategic food reserve mechanisms. Perhaps in part because the risks of severe disruptions to food systems in the country that a strategic food reserve could mitigate are relatively low, the current strategic food reserve system for the country is relatively informal. Government simply has requested that rice importers maintain in their warehouses in Monrovia a quantity of rice sufficient to cover two months of imports. While this system may prove to be adequate, more rigorous analysis of how Liberia can reliably maintain rapid access to adequate stocks of rice is called for. An accounting of the full costs the state will face in considering any of a range of strategic food reserve options will be included in this analysis.

International food aid

Over the years of crisis and especially in the recovery period since 2003, international food assistance has constituted an important leg of Liberia's national food security. As Liberia evolves from a state recovering from crisis to one seeking sustained human development and economic growth, the continuing value of targeted food assistance for the food security of the country must be evaluated. Indeed, one potential indicator of a food secure Liberia is that it does not require international food aid.

Make appropriate use of international food assistance. However, such food assistance is a potentially useful resource for consolidating social and economic recovery and for development in the country. Food-for-education programs improve children's short-term access to food both to improve learning performance and to encourage higher enrolment and attendance rates. Also of critical importance are food-based nutrition interventions or Mother-Child-Health programmes targeted at pregnant and lactating women and pre-school children through supplementary feeding programmes. (For both types of programs, to

maximize the nutrition and health benefits of the food provided, other non-food items and services such as iron-folate supplements, de-worming medicines, pre-natal care, water and sanitation, and nutrition and hygiene promotion are critical.) The Food Security for Local Initiatives program is improving local transport, market, and social infrastructure, while providing needed employment. Food aid could be an important component of social safety net programs that government establishes to assist the destitute and most vulnerable meet their food needs and strengthen their livelihoods. Finally, food aid would certainly be a valuable element in assisting the Liberian government to respond to any future widespread food security crises.

Given this broad set of uses to which food assistance can be put, any action taken by the Liberian government to limit the salience of international food assistance as a means to ensure that sufficient food is available in the country will only follow a thorough assessment of the benefits and future costs of continued reliance on such assistance for well-defined activities.

However, as a long-term objective, government will seek to use local food sources for these programs, either through sales to the agencies that run them, such as the school feeding program, or through the use of food vouchers that program beneficiaries will redeem in local markets. Such mechanisms will add demand to and serve to strengthen local food economies.

Improving access to food

The priorities with regard to increasing the access of Liberians to food primarily lie within the realms of increasing opportunities for secure and remunerative employment and increased incomes for all Liberians and improving transport and marketing infrastructure so that Liberians have better physical access to food. The two are very closely linked, as improved infrastructure will enhance employment and income-earning opportunities for all. Both of these issues are priorities of the current master development framework of government, the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy. The economic growth strategies of the PRS focusing on employment and infrastructure development are central to raising general levels of access to food. Consequently, little is added here to the frameworks established in the PRS for action in these areas. Success in achieving these objectives will provide a range of significant contributions to enhanced food security and improved nutrition in Liberia.

Nevertheless, in considering priority actions under the FSNS to increase access to food by all Liberians, three areas are considered – enhancing access to factors of production, particularly for agriculture; improving agricultural markets for both food and non-food produce; and strengthening safety net programs to ensure access to food by those in Liberian communities who least able to obtain it through their own efforts.

Broaden secure access to factors of production. The vision of agricultural development in the country described in the Statement of Policy Intent in Agriculture, one of the policy documents for the Ministry of Agriculture, consists of the “transformation of smallholder agriculture into a sustainable, diversified, income-generating, modernized, and competitive sector”. The realization of a dynamic smallholder agricultural sector with such characteristics will ensure access to food for the farming households themselves as well as contribute significantly to that of the non-farm population of Liberia. However, for such a vision to be realized requires that all farmers – men and women, young and old – have secure access to the factors of general agricultural production – land, in particular, but also labor; seed, animals, financial services, or other inputs; and knowledge. In working to progressively realize the rights of all Liberians to sufficient safe and nutritious food, a key duty of the Liberian government is to facilitate without any discrimination sustainable and

secure access to those resources and assets that are important for people's livelihoods, including land, water, forests, fisheries and livestock.

In consequence, this strategy recognizes the importance of land tenure reform to poverty reduction, income generation, and the food security of all Liberians. As such, the activities of the Governance Reform Commission on land tenure are critical to the institutional and economic framework within which food security can be assured in Liberia and are complementary to the objectives of this strategy.

Similarly, labor market reform is a pressing issue for improved access to food, as well as for the continued national security of Liberia. Customary labor markets that operate in an unjust fashion, unable to provide workers with sufficient income to meet the subsistence needs of their households, much less build up their asset base, are seen by several respected analysts of the recent crises in Liberia to be a basic source of the conflict and one that endures today. A diversified, income-generating, modernized, and competitive agricultural sector will require a well-trained workforce that is able to provide their labor on terms that are beneficial both to themselves and, if working for others, to their employers. While some regulation of agricultural labor markets is needed to ensure that workers rights are protected, of equal importance is ensuring that all Liberians receive sufficient education to participate in the economy – particularly in agriculture, but in other sectors as well – in order to achieve the vision of a vibrant agricultural sector within a strong Liberian economy.

These efforts to enhance employment opportunities to improve access to food are particularly pressing for Liberian youth. The success of current initiatives to provide youth with education and skills for employment through traditional education and vocational training programs is critical to the long-term food security of Liberian households. Moreover, youth employment efforts can be linked directly to the provision of public goods to meet many of the food and nutrition objectives laid out in this strategy or simply to increase food production and processing. However, for youth to take their own initiative and to engage in profitable agricultural enterprises will require that they have unmediated access to land, seeds, tools, and technical training – resources that are often provided to older members in the community only – as well as to sources of agricultural financing.

Ensuring that farmers, old or young and male or female, have reliable access to improved seeds and animals, to other inputs; and to knowledge of improved agricultural technologies is a key responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture that was noted in the discussion on the priorities linked to availability of food. Given their importance for improving food production, raising incomes, and ensuring that more food is available in local markets in the country, these issues are equally salient to improving the access that all Liberians have to food, whether they are farmers or engaged in other economic activities.

Improve agricultural markets. Enhancing access to food also requires improving markets for both food and non-food produce. Better performing agricultural market systems in Liberia will enable improved incomes for producers and traders and reduced costs for consumers. Improving road and market infrastructure is a key element of this. High transport costs for food and other produce reduce the general availability of food, while also constraining incomes and limiting the access that many Liberians have to food. Steps to improve physical market structures would also be of value for reducing food spoilage, enabling processing, and improving storage, while also facilitating marketing. Improved infrastructure is given priority in all government policies and strategies, and this strategy echoes this.

In addition to improving market-related infrastructure, government will take steps to enhance the flow of market information throughout all markets of the country. With information broadcast on market prices and opportunities, producers will be able to trade their produce more confidently and more readily respond to the demand of consumers for produce, increasing the amount available at prices that better reflect the supply of and demand for particular food and non-food items. Such improvements in market information will improve the access to food of both producers, through increased incomes, and consumers, through lower prices as more producers respond to market demand. Recent important advances in information and communication technologies in Liberia – most notably the extension to many county trading centers of cell phone service and FM radio broadcasting – will be exploited for this purpose.

It is also reemphasized here that for cash crop production to enhance access to food by producers, a necessary requirement is that active markets in the cash crops produced be locally accessible to farmers. As noted, cocoa and coffee markets in most parts of the nation are weak at present, with very few buyers to be found. These markets will be strengthened to enhance the income farmers realize from the production of these crops, enhancing the food security of their households.

Similarly, the large rubber, oil palm, and mining concessions provide potentially important market opportunities for food crops offered for sale by local farmers. Government will work to build stronger linkages between these concessions and local economies, particularly local food economies. There is considerable scope for improving national food availability through farmers responding to the demand for food of the many employees of these enterprises. As these market linkages are strengthened, it is expected to result both in improved access to a greater range and quantities of foods by concession employees and higher incomes for producers.

Finally, the non-farm elements of the rural market economy are critical to a vibrant agricultural sector and agricultural markets. Increased productivity in the farming sector raises per capita income in the household, enabling family members to engage in non-farm activities and contributes to diversification of household livelihood sources and the rural economy. A broader range of livelihood opportunities for rural households result in greater economic resilience for rural communities – agricultural productivity increases coupled with efficient agricultural markets lead to growth in off-farm income opportunities in rural areas which, in turn through a virtuous cycle, sustains investments in improved agricultural productivity in an area.

Strengthen social safety nets. Finally, ensuring access to food for those in Liberia who through their own efforts are unable either temporarily or permanently to gain access to food historically has been assured through traditional social safety nets organized on the basis of kinship and community ties. A potential long-term consequence of the breakdown of social cohesion that the civil war brought about in many parts of Liberia is that these customary social safety net mechanisms no longer function effectively. Social ties may have broken irreparably in the years of conflict. Communities impoverished during the war may have insufficient resources to care for their most destitute members. Those who have moved to Monrovia in recent years may be unable to build strong social networks, and their vulnerability to food insecurity is increased due to the more limited social support upon which they can rely.

In consequence, the government commits itself to working with communities across the country to reconstitute the customary mechanisms of social support that were critical in the past to safeguard access to food for Liberian households. Government recognizes that such

customary, locally-managed support mechanisms when managed in a participatory and transparent manner are likely to be more effective than any government led efforts. However, government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, will also closely examine and assess whether public social safety net programs should be established. The programs could utilize various mechanisms to provide benefits, including conditional transfers, in which recipients are required to undertake certain actions or behaviors to qualify, or public works programs. Such programs would ensure that Liberians living in social situations where customary support is unavailable or insufficient are able reliably to access the food they need and safeguard their livelihoods. Programs will be designed to serve the needs of both those households that are chronically food insecure and those experiencing transitory food insecurity.

In implementing these safety net programs, transparent, non-discriminatory eligibility criteria would be established to ensure effective targeting of assistance, so that no one who is in need is excluded, or that those not in need of assistance are included. It is anticipated that if such programs are instituted, initially they will utilize international food assistance as the principal source of the benefits granted those in need. Other benefits, such as agricultural inputs, may also be provided. However, in the long-term the ambition of government is that market mechanisms will be used – beneficiaries will acquire food or other benefits from local markets using cash or vouchers granted by such programs.

Better food utilization and improved nutritional status

The enduring high levels of chronic child undernutrition in Liberia during both peacetime and times of conflict suggests that variation in availability of food or access to food does not provide a complete understanding of the key determinants of food security and aggregate nutritional status. Deficiencies in the provision of necessary complementary inputs to food – knowledge of appropriate care and the ability and resources to provide that care, public health and primary health care services, safe water, improved sanitation, adequate housing, and so on – result in stunted children, high child mortality, and, for many Liberians, shortened lives that are filled with illness and reduced physical and mental capabilities. The analysis of the CFSNS surveys conducted in 2006 provide compelling recent evidence of the need to go beyond merely examining food in working towards a food secure and well nourished Liberia.

Several nutrition and food utilization related actions have been selected as priorities for government support under the FSNS. Most of these actions are the responsibility of sectors and agencies that lie outside of the agriculture sector. Consequently, it is particularly in addressing nutrition and food utilization issues that the multi-sectoral character of this strategy is most apparent. Moreover, several of these priorities are interventions targeted at those in the Liberian population who are nutritionally the most vulnerable – infants and young children and women of childbearing age. Proper food utilization and nutritional care for these individuals will provide tremendous benefits over the long term and result in substantial advances in Liberia's human and economic development.

Promote child growth. Government will dedicate sufficient human and financial resources to carry out effective child growth monitoring and promotion throughout Liberia. Initial contact with an undernourished child or the caregiver of the child is needed for direct nutrition-related actions to have any value. Such monitoring and promotion activities, particularly through outreach within the community but also at health facilities, provide an initial and critical point of contact for providing needed nutritional interventions to infants and young children and their caregivers. Child growth promotion activities enable the mother or other caregiver in the child's household to focus on the nutritional needs of the child and,

with the assistance of health professionals, gain appropriate knowledge on better nutritional care.

Growth monitoring and promotion includes weighing of infants and young children, comparing their weights to standards to assess whether their growth is appropriate or not, and analyzing the causes of negative deviance in growth with the caregiver in order to address the problems identified. The actions may involve the provision of complementary medical treatment or preventative health care such as deworming, micronutrient supplementation, and immunizations, behavior change communication, or even nutritional rehabilitation, including referring severely undernourished children to therapeutic feeding centers. It is particularly in the dialogue between the mother or other caregiver in the child's household and health professionals where the real value of child growth monitoring and promotion activities is situated. Consequently, the nutritional knowledge of the health professional involved must be shared in a manner that enables the caregiver to act appropriately. Moreover, the process of identifying actions to be taken to improve the growth of a child should be based upon locally available resources for the caregiver and be sensitive to indigenous medical practices and beliefs surrounding child feeding and care.

However, government recognizes that these monitoring and counseling activities are not sufficient in themselves to deal with problems of undernutrition. Government will ensure that resources are made available so that when nascent undernutrition problems in a child are identified through regular growth monitoring, effective action can be taken to address the problem. It does no good to expend considerable resources to put in place a system to weigh and measure young children, but then fail to have in place the capacity to take action when action is needed. Growth promotion is the aim of any child growth monitoring activities.

Take essential nutrition actions. Seven essential nutrition actions (ENA), when taken together, make a significant difference in the nutritional and general well-being and survival of infants, young children, and women of childbearing age and significantly reduce undernutrition related morbidity and mortality. These actions are:

1. Promoting optimal breastfeeding.
2. Promoting initiation of optimal complementary feeding at 6 months of age.
3. Nutritional care of the sick child during and after illness to prevent growth failure.
4. Improving women's nutrition, especially during pregnancy and lactation.
5. Controlling anemia in women and children.
6. Vitamin A deficiency control, particularly in young children.
7. Iodine deficiency control.

The promotion of these ENAs is the principal direct approach by which undernutrition can be sustainably and substantially reduced among young children and women in Liberia. This approach builds on the opportunity provided by the child growth promotion contact with the child and his or her caregiver, as well as any other contacts these individuals have with the health services, in order to directly address key aspects of their nutritional needs.

The objective of the ENA approach is to consolidate these now separate activities into a systematic, holistic technical package. As such, they are a component of the Basic Package of Health Services that the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is committed to provide in all clinics and hospitals in the country. Although all opportunities are to be taken to promote these nutrition behaviors, the ENA approach will be promoted especially at five contact points of health service delivery over the lifecycle:

1. Pregnancy.
2. Labor, delivery, and immediate post-partum.
3. Postnatal and family planning.
4. Immunization and child growth monitoring and promotion clinics.
5. Sick child consultations.

Moreover, the implementation of the ENA approach is to be extended beyond health facilities to reach into communities through health promotion activities undertaken as part of community-driven development activities.

Save the acutely malnourished. Therapeutic feeding services for severely undernourished children will receive required support from government. These represent a high priority because of the relatively high prevalence of life threatening acute undernutrition among Liberian children. The number of existing institutional therapeutic feeding centers will be expanded to form a sufficiently dense network of centers across the country that is fully integrated into the national health system. Moreover, increasingly efforts will be made to provide such services through community-based therapeutic care using simple, locally adapted protocols for treatment. The needs of those children who are acutely malnourished but less severely will be addressed through supplemental feeding programs at local health facilities.

Address food and nutrition needs related to HIV infection. HIV poses a clear risk to the food security and nutritional well-being of Liberians. In countries in which infection rates are high, it has had a crippling impact on household food security, nutritional caring practices and capacity, and the provision of basic public services. As an element of its approach to confronting HIV and AIDS, government will ensure that Liberians living with the virus will receive proper food and nutritional care to delay the progression of infection to clinical AIDS, prolonging life and increasing their economic and social productivity. Households that have members who are infected with the virus will be supported in their efforts to provide proper food and nutritional care to extend the lives of those infected and to increase the effectiveness of anti-retroviral drug treatment. As necessary, programs for the prevention of mother to child transmission of the HIV virus will be put in place.

Improve care. Enhancing caring practices in the household to ensure that all is done so that all members are well nourished is problematic to address within the institutional structure of government. This is because care is not really a sectoral issue, but a community and household issue that draws upon resources supplied in part by various sectors. Improving caring practices is primarily about reinforcing good existing knowledge and practices and building new knowledge of caregivers and the general public, while ensuring that caregivers have the resources that they need to provide proper care to those who are dependent upon them for their nutritional needs.

Changing attitudes and practices for improved nutrition is necessary if Liberians are to confront the problems of food insecurity and poor nutrition at all levels of society. Behavior change communication efforts provide targeted knowledge so that caregivers and others are better able to ensure their own good nutritional status and that of the members of their household and community. The issues that must be addressed in such efforts include breastfeeding, complementary feeding of infants, hygiene and sanitation, use of locally available and accessible foods for a proper diet, and so on. This information can be conveyed in school, through public health activities, all forms of popular media, and individual counseling. At least some forms of this information will be provided to mothers and other caregivers in their native languages. Educational curricula used in primary and secondary

schools and in other training programs will be reassessed and modified to ensure that it provides students with sufficient information on the broad range of caring practices needed to enable children to grow properly in order to meet their full potential. Similarly, school health programs will be strengthened in terms of their food and nutrition content.

With regards to resources for proper nutritional care, government will provide key public services to alleviate the resource constraints that caregivers face. A major resource constraint to providing good care is that of time. Efforts are to be made to introduce appropriate, cost effective timesaving technologies for common household tasks, such as rice milling, other food processing activities, or in agriculture.

Ensuring that caregivers have access to the resources they require to provide optimal care also has important implications on how intra-household decisions on resource allocations are made and on gender relationships within society. Household resources should be used appropriately to ensure that all within a household have access to what is required to attain good nutritional status. The primary caregivers for most young children in Liberia are women. However, fathers, when present in the household, often are the primary decision-makers on how household resources are used. Consequently, fathers must also be recipients of information on the importance of good caring practices for the well-being of their young children.

More broadly, government recognizes that improving caring practices requires greater empowerment of women within households, within Liberian society in general, and within political decision-making processes from community to national level. The limited access that women in Liberia have to all of the resources they require to effectively care for their young children directly results in higher levels of undernutrition and poorer health for their children and for themselves. The need to effectively address these gendered issues of proper nutritional care in Liberia provides an additional compelling and pragmatic reason for government to continue its efforts at seeking to empower Liberian women socially, economically, and politically.

Finally, in discussing nutritional care for young children, there are particular challenges related to ensuring appropriate care in urban households. First, often mothers employed in the urban economy are constrained in their ability to provide care to their children. Of particular note are the problems they encounter in optimally breastfeeding their babies. In consequence, they are more likely to rely on breast milk substitutes. Secondly, socialization processes may differ sharply from those found in rural areas. Changing social norms in Monrovia, particularly during the period of crisis, appear to have resulted in an increase the number of young single mothers who do not have the necessary understanding or family support to provide their children with appropriate nutritional care. Consequently, one finds greater numbers of acutely malnourished children in urban areas than should be expected. For both sorts of constraints to optimal care for children, government will act through educational and, if necessary, legislative means to ensure that these mothers are able to provide optimal care to their children.

Fortify foods. The industrial fortification of foods with micronutrients has been used globally as an effective way to ensure that diseases related to micronutrient deficiencies are controlled. However, fortification is problematic in Liberia where little food that can be easily fortified is consumed. The one exception is bread, which can be made from fortified wheat flour. Government will develop fortification standards, particularly for iron and folic acid, for all bread flour that is used in Liberia, whether imported or milled here.

Most of the other food consumed in Liberia is processed in the household or is purchased in whole grain form and, thus, difficult to fortify. Nevertheless, technologies are being developed to industrially fortify grain rice with micronutrients. Government will monitor these developments and explore the feasibility of applying these technologies in Liberia or putting in place incentives so that the nation's international rice suppliers provide rice that has been so fortified. Parallel research efforts are underway globally to bio-fortify rice and cassava through breeding varieties with enhanced levels of micronutrients. If these research efforts succeed in producing nutrient-dense varieties of these crops that are adapted to Liberia's agroecologies, government will promote their production across the country.

Although iodine deficiency disease is not common in Liberia, renewed attention is to be paid to ensuring that all of the salt consumed in the country is iodized. Iodized salt has been shown worldwide to be an effective means of providing the very small but vital quantities of iodine that our bodies require for proper mental and physical growth. Government will promote the consumption of iodized salt, ensuring its continued widespread availability, and develop and enforce regulations restricting the use of non-iodized salt in Liberia.

Enforce food standards. Food standards enforcement is important for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy in two areas. The first is the implementation and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which Liberia as a member-state of the World Health Organization adopted in 1981. Breast-milk substitutes will continue to be made available in Liberia, as they are useful to ensure proper infant nutrition in a specific and limited number of medical circumstances. However, the use of commercial infant formulas has two dangers – first, the potential spillover effect of inappropriate and unnecessary use of such breast-milk substitutes and, secondly, safety in terms of nutritional value and freedom from harmful microorganisms when mothers lack the resources and knowledge to purchase and prepare the products properly. Consequently, adequate enforcement against unsafe promotion and use of such breast-milk substitutes will be provided by government.

Secondly, food standards are to be enforced relating to food fortification and nutritional supplements. The safety and the nutritional quality of commercially fortified products will be monitored, as will that of nutritional supplements marketed in the country.

Diversify diets. Dietary diversification efforts will be undertaken to improve the micronutrient quality of food consumed by Liberian households. Government will undertake campaigns to promote the adoption, production, and consumption of micronutrient-dense food crops and animal products to complement staple food crops. Of particular interest is substantially increasing the consumption of micronutrient-rich fruits, vegetables, and animal-source foods by all Liberians – males and females, children and adults.

Increase access to safe water, sanitation, and proper housing. Finally, government will continue its efforts to promote healthy living environments across the country. Hygiene promotion through proper sanitation and housing has a substantial impact on reducing diarrhea morbidity, undernutrition, and mortality. It also is important to control various worm infections that are widespread in Liberia. Equally important is the development of local safe water supplies both to reduce the time spent in collecting water and to contribute to the development of a healthy local environment.

These priorities for enhancing food utilization and nutritional outcomes were chosen from a wide range of potential interventions. As new approaches to improve nutritional status are developed both in Liberia and elsewhere, government will continually monitor the

development of these approaches and judge whether they are appropriate for wider application across the country through existing or new projects and programs.

Reducing vulnerability, improving resilience

Efforts to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience to shocks that cause food insecurity and undernutrition in Liberia fall within but also go well beyond the scope of this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy. The aim of such efforts must be to reduce the exposure of the country and Liberian households to such risks and to strengthen the means used to cope with such shocks. The sorts of shocks that are of concern were noted earlier – conflict and price and market shocks, most notably. However, household-level shocks also are important to consider, including ill health and death among household members, pests and disease affecting agricultural production, loss of employment, and being victims of crime.

No specific efforts formulated solely to address vulnerability or improve resilience are included in this strategy. Broadly, the successful implementation of this strategy in addressing the priorities noted under the other three dimensions of food security will contribute to increased resilience to shocks to household and national food security. This will be done simply by strengthening the livelihoods pursued by Liberian households and the improved access to food resulting from those strengthened livelihoods. However, within those sets of priorities, those with specific shock avoidance and mitigation elements include assessments of the need for public social safety net programs and a national strategic food reserve and diversification of food production.

Of central importance to reducing vulnerability to food insecurity is the institution of regular effective food security and nutrition monitoring. The functions and design of the mechanisms by which such monitoring will be carried out are discussed in more detail below. A key element of these monitoring functions will be the provision of early warning of emerging food insecurity crises in the country so that action can be taken to mitigate their effects before suffering and impoverishment result.

Enabling factors

In addition to the actions grouped by the four dimensions of food security listed above, steps also must be taken to ensure that there is sufficient human capacity and expertise to implement the strategy, that research is undertaken to improve understanding of the varied ways in which Liberian households acquire their food, and community-level actions to improve local food security are strengthened.

Meet capacity needs. A key requirement for the effective implementation of this strategy is the building of national expertise in food security and nutrition planning and program implementation in the country. Such expertise needs to be situated both across many sectors within government and among partner institutions in the non-governmental or in the private sectors. In keeping with the priorities for training stated in both the CAAS-Lib and the National Health Policy and Plan, the curricula of educational institutions in Liberia providing sectorally specific training to the diploma level in agriculture and rural development and in health will be reviewed and upgraded to include training on food security and nutrition related topics. Similarly, the curricula used in primary and secondary schools in the country will be modified as necessary to ensure that basic issues relating to food security and proper nutrition within the households are covered appropriately.

In addition to building basic skills in agricultural production, health care provision, the provision of water and sanitation services, and other basic sectoral expertise, the

implementation of the strategy will also require subject matter specialists with particular professional skills. These include:

- ♦ Public health nutrition skills to undertake nutrition analysis and design nutrition interventions at community and national levels.
- ♦ Food security and nutrition monitoring skills including those required for data collection, analysis, and communication of information.
- ♦ Technical skills in food policy analysis to ensure that food is made available in the most efficient manner possible with equitable access for all Liberians.

There are only a handful of individuals in Liberia with some specialized professional training in public health nutrition, food security monitoring, and food policy analysis. They are insufficient to provide high quality technical support to government efforts to improve food security and address undernutrition, as well as to non-governmental organizations working with communities across the country. In the longer term, it may be shown to be effective to develop training opportunities in these subjects at the University of Liberia. In the medium term, it is expected that such expertise will be gained more efficiently outside of Liberia, preferably by sending Liberian trainees to foreign universities with strong programs on these and related topics. For staff that require higher level training but not in such an intensive fashion, specific skills will be acquired through international distance learning programs on these topics that have been developed in recent years.

However, it is important to recognize that government is not solely responsible for developing and providing the capacity needed to implement this strategy. As has become evident over the past several years as Liberia recovers from the years of crisis, local and international non-governmental organizations, multi-lateral development partners, and the private sector are potentially important partners in working with government towards its policy objectives, including those of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy. Much of the existing capacity in Liberia for the provision of food security related public goods – both technically and administratively – currently lies within the United Nations agencies and in the NGO sector. Government recognizes that partnership with such organizations, as well as with the private sector in food production, marketing, and trade, may be an acceptable and effective long-term solution for meeting the food security and nutrition needs of the country. Assessments will be made by government of the likely viability, efficiency, and effectiveness associated with non-governmental partners taking on responsibility for the provision of key public goods necessary for national and local food security and improved nutrition. It is likely that at least some of these responsibilities can be assigned to these partner agencies. If so, mechanisms for coordination and oversight of these activities will be developed and managed by the Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee that is described later in this document.

Improve knowledge on household food security. While a considerable body of socio-economic research on components of the food systems and diets of households across Liberia had been built up in the several decades before civil war broke out in 1989, no similar detailed and academically-rigorous research has been conducted since then. With the significant social, economic, and institutional changes that occurred in both rural and urban households and communities in Liberia during the period of crisis, there is an urgent need for better understanding of the varied means by which households now gain access to food, how that food is distributed within the household, the quality of the food that is eaten, and other elements of the varied food and dietary knowledge and practices of households across the

country. Such knowledge is required to inform the design and implementation of effective programs through which the objectives of this strategy will be attained.

Consequently, government will support the undertaking of high-quality academic research efforts to fill this knowledge gap. While government will welcome scientists from global research centers of excellence to participate in such efforts, in order to develop sufficient and sustained research capacity within Liberia, all such efforts are expected to be done in collaboration with researchers and students from institutions within Liberia, most notably the University of Liberia. All resources provided by government for such research will be allocated on a competitive basis using academic peer review to assess the relevance of the research proposed and the suitability of the methods to be employed.

Strengthen community-level action. To improve aggregate food security and nutritional status in Liberia, change must occur within households and communities across the country – in particular, the malnourished individual must be reached.

For sustainable improvements at this level, community-driven action must be taken to address key development problems, including food insecurity and undernutrition. The role for government and its development partners should be to facilitate such action by the communities with which they work. Such an approach is in keeping with the emphasis of government on decentralization of its administrative and planning functions with consultation, prioritization, and planning at district and county levels and on the accountability of local authorities to the communities they serve to accomplish results. This approach requires government plans to be flexible and its agencies to be responsive to the development priorities that communities establish for themselves, including those priorities related to food security and improved nutrition.

The model of community-driven development suggested here has proven especially effective in addressing local problems of food insecurity and undernutrition in other developing countries. Of critical importance in such a model of development are the roles played by community mobilizers and facilitators.

- ♦ Mobilizers are long-term residents of the community. They work to promote community-based action, facilitate local analysis of development issues and evaluation of the effectiveness of any actions taken to address them, and serve as a link between communities and service delivery systems. Frequent contact is required between mobilizers and households in the community. For successful community-driven action to reduce undernutrition in particular, studies show that an ideal ratio is one mobilizer for every 10 to 20 households in the community.
- ♦ Facilitators are normally paid local staff of a government agency or NGO. Facilitators play a supportive and problem-solving role for community mobilizers, and may help to train them. They form a link between the community mobilizers and the “outside world”. Ideally, there should be one facilitator for every 10 to 20 community mobilizers.

Although relatively simple in design, community mobilizers are central to the successful implementation of such a model of community-driven development to address problems of food insecurity and undernutrition or other development challenges. Government will pay special attention to how reasonable incentives can be provided community mobilizers to assure their continued participation in these community-driven development processes. Additionally, close consideration will be given to building the capacity of community mobilizers so that they are effective agents of change in their communities. The District

Development Committees that are currently being put in place across the country potentially could energize such community-driven efforts.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

An institutional framework for the coordination of food security and nutrition activities and the monitoring of food insecurity and undernutrition in the country will be established as an element of the implementation of the strategy. This framework is described here.

Food Security and Nutrition Stakeholders' Forum

A Food Security and Nutrition Stakeholders' Forum (FSNSF) will be established. The FSNSF will have only consultative purposes and will meet once a year to assess the progress on the implementation of the national FSNS and make relevant recommendations. The FSNSF will be comprised of public institutions, the national civil society, international NGOs and bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies that have a stake in food security.

Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee (FSNTC)

The Technical Committee will coordinate those actions necessary to improve food security and nutrition and advocate for the necessary resources to enable the sectors to carry out those actions fully. To achieve this, it is to have clearly defined authority from government under which the relevant sectoral ministries will be required to report on and account for their food security and nutrition activities to the Committee through its Secretariat. Its coordination of the activities of non-governmental development partners of government will be more indirect and will occur through the existing government mechanisms. The FSNTC will draw its members from the key government agencies and bilateral and multilateral partners whose participation is necessary in efforts to address the problems of food insecurity and undernutrition in Liberia. Policy decisions rest with the Cabinet, while responsibility for overall policy coordination between line ministries and between Government and partners remains that of the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), in accordance with the PRS implementation framework. Therefore, all recommendations of the Technical Committee that imply policy actions or have budgetary implications are conveyed to the Cabinet through the LRDC. However, decisions that need urgent action may be directly conveyed to the Cabinet by the Minister that chairs the Technical Committee.

Within its broad coordination function, the Technical Committee shall carry out the following specific responsibilities.

- ♦ Develop and maintain a clear understanding of the food security and aggregate nutritional status of different populations across Liberia. This will include monitoring the situation of food insecure and nutritionally vulnerable groups and understanding what actions are needed and by which sectors and partners to most effectively address the risks to their food security that such groups are facing. In exercising this responsibility, technical elements related to data compilation and analysis will be carried out by staff of the Secretariat to the FSNTC.
- ♦ Provide oversight on the implementation of the Strategy so that it serves to promote the rights of all Liberians to sufficient food and proper nutrition. Moreover, the Technical Committee will be responsible for ensuring that activities carried out in support of the strategy mitigate rather than exacerbate sources of conflict in Liberia.
- ♦ Play an active role in policymaking within government, such as ensuring that food insecurity and undernutrition are reflected in the Poverty Reduction Strategy as basic problems of human and economic development confronting the country, as well as in

the strategies of those sectors whose activities are central to improving food security and aggregate nutritional status in Liberia.

- ♦ Ensure that the policies and action plans of those public sectors and agencies with clear food security and nutrition-related responsibilities reflect the contribution each is mandated to undertake with regard to reducing food insecurity and undernutrition. Such a function will include working with these sectors and agencies to revise their policies to better emphasize the role of the sector or agency in this regard.
- ♦ Engage in the annual government planning process to ensure that the action plans and budget requests made by these public sectors and agencies reflect the contributions each is mandated to undertake with regard to reducing food insecurity and undernutrition so that sufficient resources are allocated to them to permit those actions to be undertaken. The technical committee is to hold the public sectors and agencies concerned to account for results and ensure that their actions in these areas are carried out as effectively as possible.
- ♦ Assess at least every three years the overall effectiveness of the efforts being undertaken within the country to attain the objectives of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy.
- ♦ Maintain close relations with Liberia's international development partners in order to raise supplemental resources for sectoral activities to address food insecurity and improve nutrition.
- ♦ Communicate to stakeholders and to the nation as a whole through briefings, press releases, and public addresses the policies, priorities, targets, and results of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy.

The **Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee** will be chaired by the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Liberia. As such, the technical Committee will report to the President and/or cabinet on the status of food security and nutrition in Liberia and on the effectiveness of efforts being undertaken to address food insecurity and undernutrition.

The full Membership in the Technical Committee will include the following:

- Ministry of Agriculture;
- Ministry of Health and Social Welfare;
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry;
- Ministry of Public Works (water & sanitation);
- Ministry of Planning & Economic Affairs;
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Internal Affairs (or representative from county administration);
- Ministry of Gender and Development;
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Labor
- Bilateral development partners (one representative)
- Multilateral development partners (one representative delegated jointly by FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, and the World Bank);

The full membership of the Technical Committee will meet at least once every three months, with other meetings held as necessary.

A **Secretariat** to the Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee (FSNTC) will be formed. The Secretariat will be housed as a separate unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and will directly report to the chair of the Technical Committee. . The Secretariat will purely act as a body that gathers inter-sectoral information, analyses it and reports it to the Technical Committee, which then takes up issues with the cabinet and/or the president. The Technical Committee will be responsible for ensuring that the Secretariat functions effectively with an executive officer, technical experts, and resources adequate to fulfill its responsibilities. . .

The housing of the secretariat within the Ministry of Agriculture is done in order to use existing institutional frameworks in the initial implementation of activities to attain the objectives of this Food Security and Nutrition Strategy – that is, to start with what is already in place. However, as has been noted repeatedly in this document, attaining broad food security and, particularly, improved nutrition requires inputs from several public sectors. Consequently, it is important to highlight the risks related to housing the Secretariat within the Ministry of Agriculture. By virtue of the day-to-day management of the implementation of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy by the Ministry of Agriculture, without sufficient oversight, it is quite possible that resources provided to support the implementation of the Strategy will be disproportionately allocated to agricultural production oriented activities. The Technical Committee, as a cross-sectoral body, must provide the necessary oversight to prevent such an unbalanced distribution of the resources made available under the Strategy.

The Secretariat initially will consist of three professional staff: a budget and program analyst assisted by one senior and junior food security and nutrition analysts.

The budget and program analyst will serve as Executive Officer of the Secretariat. His or her primary technical responsibilities will include:

- ♦ Leading the design of a database on food security and food security related projects and ensuring that it is maintained;
- ♦ Ensuring that information from relevant external institutions and from divisions within the MoA is supplied on time;
- ♦ Leading the Secretariat's team in the analysis of the information;
- ♦ Ensuring that reports are compiled and sent to the members of the Technical Committee on time;
- ♦ Organizing the meetings of the Technical Committee and the annual meeting of the Stakeholders Forum;
- ♦ Assisting the chair of the Technical Committee in its coordination tasks and
- ♦ Assisting or acting as proxy for the chair of the Technical Committee in co-chairing the Joint steering Committee (JPSC).

At least one of the analysts will be senior technical staff equivalent in rank to a Division Director. They will have a close understanding of and experience with the resource allocation and planning processes of the Liberian government, with demonstrated technical expertise in food security and nutrition programming, monitoring, and evaluation. Candidates for the analysts position preferably should have broad experience within government across several sectors.

The two food security and nutrition analysts will ensure that all monitoring activities are done in a timely manner, data analyzed and reports are compiled. These activities are described in more detail in the next section of this Strategy.

- The senior analyst will be responsible for all of the dedicated food security and nutrition monitoring functions under the FSNS, including that all results are communicated appropriately. This professional will coordinate the strategic planning and implementation of all food security and nutrition monitoring tasks carried out by LISGIS or the Division of Socio-economic Research, Marketing, and Agricultural Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture and will be responsible for the quality of any analyses undertaken by these two affiliated agencies or within the Secretariat itself. Moreover, he or she will work with other data providers, ensuring that any data provided is appropriate for food security and nutrition monitoring and is properly documented. Finally, this analyst will ensure that the performance indicators established in the action plan that will be developed for the implementation of the FSNS are continually monitored.

This individual will have expertise in food and nutrition monitoring and analysis, with a minimum of five years of experience. Candidates for this position will have obtained a Master's degree in a relevant field, such as food policy analysis, public health nutrition, or statistics. They also must demonstrate quantitative data management and analysis skills, including in the use of spatial data with Geographic Information Systems.

- The junior food security and nutrition analyst will be responsible primarily for quantitative analyses of the relevant data and maintaining a public database of all food security and nutrition information managed and archived by the Secretariat. This individual will have expertise in data management and quantitative analysis, with a minimum of two years of experience. Candidates for this position will have obtained a Bachelor's degree in a relevant field, such as policy analysis, statistics, or database management or possess a food, nutrition, or agricultural related degree with significant course work in database management and quantitative analysis.

In the medium-term a communications officer also will be assigned to the Secretariat. This individual would be responsible, first, for ensuring that the priorities of the FSNS are widely understood, both by government officials across the public sectors and agencies and by the citizens of the country, in order to maintain continued political and popular support for government efforts to address food insecurity and undernutrition. Second, the communications officer would establish communication channels extending to county, district, and community levels through which individuals and civil society organizations in Liberia can make known to the Technical Committee their opinions on food security and nutrition priorities and programming, particularly where necessary public goods and services are not being delivered as they should. Such active two-way communication is an essential element in ensuring that the Technical Committee is accountable to all Liberians for achieving the objectives of the Strategy. Third, as the food security and nutrition monitoring activities increase in scope, regular communication of the current food security and nutrition situation in the country using diverse media will require closer attention than the food security and nutrition analysts will be able to provide. This officer would manage the dissemination of this information.

Technical assistance will be sought from donor partners over the initial three years of operation of the Secretariat to put in place the skills, mechanisms, and material resources

necessary for the Stakeholders' Forum the Technical Committee, and the Secretariat to function effectively and efficiently.

Financial resources for the operation of the Technical Committee and its Secretariat will be drawn from the budgetary allocation made by government. Resources needed for the meetings of the Stakeholders' Forum and the Technical Committee will be drawn from this budgetary allocation and managed by the executive officer of the Secretariat. Budgetary allocations to the Technical Committee will be classified as a first-claim expenditure within budget guidelines.

Legal guidance will be obtained for the establishment of the secretariat so that it can act as an autonomous Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), able to administer its own funds, recruit personnel and procure equipment.

There is no need at the moment to replicate the FSNS planning and decision-making framework at county level, since each line ministry will be responsible for supplying information to the Secretariat. Only, feedback to the counties will be provided from the LRDC to the County Development Steering Committees (CDSC), in accordance with the PRS implementation and monitoring framework. However, until the CSDCs are fully operational, feedback could be the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In either case, the Secretariat will monitor and ensure that its disaggregated analyses are fed into the county decision-making process. Also, in each county MoA staff will act as the official contact points of the Secretariat within the administration to serve the national Technical Committee through providing information and by responding to queries on county and other local-level issues. They will also ensure that food security and nutrition related issues are on the agenda at CDSC meetings. Their duties as contact points for the Secretariat will be in addition to their existing duties. No new positions will be created to fulfill these county-level functions.

Food security and nutrition monitoring functions

The food security and nutrition monitoring functions under the FSNS will be the responsibility of the Secretariat to the Technical Committee located within the Ministry of Agriculture. The Executive Officer of the Secretariat will be responsible for ensuring that all monitoring and information needs on the food security and nutritional status of the population of Liberia required by the Technical Committee are met.

Monitoring of two types will be done:

- ♦ Monitoring of food security and nutrition status in the country at county and, where necessary, sub-county levels and for particular vulnerable groups, with particular attention to providing early warning on any emerging problems.
- ♦ Monitoring of efforts being made to address the priorities of the FSNS strategy, with assessment of progress towards achievement of targets.

In monitoring and evaluating food security and nutrition status across the country, the food security and nutrition analysts will regularly generate information that describes the exposure to risks affecting the food security situation of vulnerable groups and communities in various geographic areas across Liberia. In reporting on any crises, the reports of the analysts must identify accurately who is at risk; where they are located; how many people are involved; what is happening to them and why; how severe the situation is and how it can be expected to evolve over time; what has already been done to address the problem by households, communities, government, and international partners; and what more assistance is needed.

The data needed for monitoring of food security and nutrition status is of two sorts – data to establish baseline conditions and data for trend monitoring from those baselines.

A new survey will have to be carried out to establish the baselines for the monitoring system since the previous Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS) was based on an incomplete sampling frame that, if used today, would not capture recent population movements, in particular the continued resettlement of IDPs and return of refugees since 2005. The recently completed national census will provide an opportunity to work with an updated sampling frame. However, this new survey will focus on key indicators by exploiting knowledge from the 2007-8 census, the 2007 Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ), the 2006 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and the 2006 CFSNS.

Thereafter, a small set of trend indicators will be identified. These will constitute the principal data regularly analyzed by the food security and nutrition analysts of the Secretariat for the Technical Committee. Trend indicators will be chosen that provide information on the various elements of the definition of food security and the strategic priorities defined in the FSNS. Examples of each are listed here:

- ♦ Availability – crop production, including prospective production taking into account rainfall and pest patterns; food imports; food aid deliveries.
- ♦ Access – changes in local income sources and livelihood strategies, market prices, road conditions, participation in social safety net programs.
- ♦ Utilization – changes in access to health services, water, and sanitation; nutritional indicators.
- ♦ Vulnerability – general risk context; early warning indicators.

Crop production estimates would be reported annually; health, consumption and food aid deliveries, quarterly; while monthly reports will be provided on food imports and market prices.

An early analytical task for the food security and nutrition monitoring analysts will be to determine the appropriate spatial resolution for the data they collect and analyze. At the start, county-level data at a minimum should be expected for monitoring most indicators. In the future, sub-county data may be required to adequately reflect the food security and nutrition conditions of county populations with significantly different livelihood patterns or residing in areas of the county with distinct agroecological conditions.

The food security and nutrition monitoring analysts in the Secretariat will primarily analyze data at county level to provide a spatially disaggregated perspective on current food security and nutrition trends in the country. Where specific nutritionally vulnerable populations that are not clustered spatially but spread across the country can be identified in the data sets analyzed, the food security and nutritional status of these populations will also be tracked. The analysts will undertake field missions as needed to develop detailed on-the-ground understanding of developing food insecurity crises across the country, working closely with county-level counterparts in doing so, particularly with the agricultural extension staff.

In undertaking this monitoring, the Secretariat will sign memoranda of understanding with line ministries, and a performance-based contract with LISGIS to implement the household surveillance system. Also, a separate memoranda of understanding could be signed between the Secretariat and LISGIS to ensure that data collected by the latter under different programmes can be used by the Secretariat for its food security and nutrition based

analyses. The importance of data sharing for the effective monitoring of food security and nutrition conditions in Liberia should be kept in mind as government further develops its statistical framework.

Data sets of interest for which LISGIS is responsible are household consumption and expenditure surveys, the national population and housing census, demographic and health surveys, dedicated nutrition and micronutrient surveys, and market price surveys, including the Consumer Price Index price series, among others. Efforts are currently underway to extend the presence of LISGIS beyond Monrovia into the counties with the establishment of county-level information offices within the county administration. These offices are expected to be important for regularly gathering district and county-specific information for food security and nutrition monitoring.

The Division of Socio-economic Research, Marketing, and Agricultural Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the collection of annual crop production statistics and, potentially, agricultural marketing data, while also conducting agricultural censuses with LISGIS. Unfortunately, this Division, its data archives, and its capacity for data collection and management were decimated during the last outbreak of conflict in 2003. Consequently, total rebuilding of the abilities of the Division is required before it will effectively contribute to food security and nutrition monitoring in the country. However, planning for doing so is sufficiently advanced to expect that the Division will be a useful partner for monitoring efforts under the FSNS within two years.

The Secretariat of the Technical Committee will be independent of any of the departments in the Ministry of Agriculture and its Executive Officer will respond directly to the Minister. This is done to permit the Secretariat to have sufficient authority to dedicate its data analysis resources solely to food security and nutrition monitoring, thereby enabling it to work in a timely manner to acquire and analyze the full range of data available on food security and nutritional status in Liberia.

In addition, the food security and nutrition monitoring analysts in the secretariat will also build working relationships with several other agencies that regularly compile data that is of use for monitoring food security and nutrition trends. These include:

- ♦ Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Of particular interest is the information collected by the Ministry on the activities of importers of rice into the country. Other information of value is that collected on market prices across the country and on the importation of other foods.
- ♦ National Information Management Center (NIMAC). This agency is an institutional outgrowth of the information needs of the United Nations agencies who have been working in Liberia since 2003. It possesses a broad set of spatial, facility, and community data of value for food security and nutrition monitoring. Although plans are being developed to transfer most of the functions of NIMAC to LISGIS, until that transfer occurs it will be a key partner of the food security and nutrition monitoring analysts in the secretariat.
- ♦ The Health Information System of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Information acquired from such systems tends to be clinic-based, so is not necessarily representative of the health and nutritional status of the population. Nevertheless, this information is of value in monitoring localized food insecurity crises.
- ♦ NGOs and United Nations agencies working in food security and health at county level are expected to be useful sources of information. The data and information

flows from such organizations might best be managed by the county-level information offices of LISGIS as they are established.

- ♦ The Liberia Meteorological Service, if functioning, would provide important agro-climatological data of relevance to gauging emerging threats to food production.

The second monitoring task of the food security and nutrition analysts of the Secretariat to the Technical Committee consists of tracking the efforts being made to address the priorities of the FSNS strategy. This activity will consist of undertaking regular inventories of the activities being carried out in the areas of food security and nutrition in all of the sectors represented in the Technical Committee with extension of this data collection effort to their partners. Information will be collected on the nature of the activities, the FSNS priorities which the activities address, and basic descriptive information on them. Key contributions to maintaining this inventory are expected to be made by the contact points for the Technical Committee established within the administration at county level. These contacts, among their other duties, will monitor the activities of community groups, local government agencies, and NGOs in their counties that have a bearing on food security and improved nutrition.

All of the data that is managed and analyzed by the food security and nutrition monitoring analysts will be placed into the public domain as soon as possible. In the short term, information and data dissemination will be a primary responsibility of the senior monitoring analyst in the Secretariat. When a communication specialist is assigned to the Secretariat, these communication functions will be the responsibility of this individual.

Technical assistance in establishing the mechanisms for food security and nutrition monitoring and the regular compilation of an inventory of activities being undertaken to address the priorities of the FSNS strategy will be sought from donor partners over the initial three years of operation of the Secretariat. This support will be required, in particular, to put in place the skills, mechanisms, and material resources necessary for the food security and nutrition monitoring analysts in the Secretariat and their data and analysis partners (LISGIS and the Division of Socio-economic Research, Marketing, and Agricultural Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture) to adequately undertake or contribute to these monitoring functions. Specific assistance will be sought in survey design for food security and nutrition monitoring, data analysis and management, and information communication.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Developing an action plan for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy

It was noted explicitly in describing the scope of the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy document that it does not define the specific mechanisms by which public agencies, NGOs, UN agencies, or private sector partners are to provide the goods and services specified in the strategy. For the FSNS to bring about change in food security and nutrition in Liberia it needs realistic, quantifiable, monitorable, and time-bound objectives and to identify the mechanisms, institutions, and resources required for its implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A separate action planning activity is needed to translate this strategy into an action plan so that the effort to achieve the objectives laid out in it can be effectively managed. If they are to be achieved, the specific priorities established in the strategy and summarized in the matrix in the annex starting on page 47 need to be translated into sets of well-defined and feasible actions. In establishing these actions, responsibility for each must be assigned and means for measuring their progress toward the desired results established.

There are three major steps in designing the action plan: 1) assembling a planning team and a workplan for doing the plan; 2) developing the initial action plan; and 3) implementing and revising the action plan as it goes forward.

Establish a planning team. Through a meeting of representatives of the proposed member institutions of the technical committee of the FSNS the members of a small cross-sectoral action planning team will be identified. The members of the action planning team should have expertise in one or more of the sub-sectors that are salient to food security and nutrition, have firsthand knowledge of Liberia's food and nutrition conditions at national and local levels, and know the structures and procedures of the Liberian government entities responsible for implementation of the FSNS.

After having reviewed the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy closely and broadly agreed on the approach that they will take, the team will develop a workplan and timeline for the development of the action plan, allocating tasks among team member for assembling the components of the action plan. The team might consider creating smaller sub-teams of three or four persons to focus on each of five groups of priority issues under the strategy –food availability; access to food; utilization and improved nutritional status, enabling factors, and the institutional framework for strategy implementation. The members of these sub-teams would not necessarily need to be members of the overarching planning team. Moreover, members of the planning team could participate in more than one sub-team. The overall planning team leader would coordinate the activities of these sub-teams and incorporate their output into the FSNS action plan.

Although the action plan will need to be developed in coordination with other policy initiatives of the government of Liberia, such as the continuing formulation of sectoral policies and of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the action plan should not require more than three months to be developed. Over this period, the team leader will be expected to regularly report on the approach being taken and on the team's progress to the members of the interim technical committee of the FSNS and to the Minister of Agriculture.

Develop the initial action plan. A good action plan will provide a sound means for managing the implementation of the strategy. Two sub-sets of tasks are involved in this step. First, the actual activities under the action plan will be identified and described. Secondly, mechanisms will be established for determining the degree of progress towards the objectives

of the FSNS in order to enable adjustments to be made in the action plan for those elements where progress is seen to be insufficient.

- 1) The content of the action plan needs to be specified. A broad set of consultations will be held to ensure that the results to be achieved through the action plan meet the needs of food insecure and undernourished individuals and households and reflect the priorities of the FSNS. Members both of the overall action planning team and the sub-teams should participate in these consultations. These consultations should particularly involve local communities together with district and county level staff to ensure that the specific actions identified are tailored to address local problems related to food security and nutrition. Moreover, the action planning teams must be certain that the results can be delivered under the plan. Consequently the capabilities of communities, local agencies, development partners, and national government sectors must be assessed with reference to the actions proposed in the plan.

The action planning team and sub-teams should bear in mind several issues whilst determining the content of the action plan.

- What is expected to change? Who is expected to change? Who and what will stimulate the change?
- Can the results be feasibly delivered given human, institutional, and financial resources?
- Are results of the actions to be taken under the action plan for the FSNS logically linked? Will joint results at one level of the action plan lead to improved food security and other higher order results and, ultimately, result in reductions in child undernutrition, the central outcome measure for the FSNS?
- Can the Technical Committee take full responsibility for each result, in partnership with the relevant ministry, agency, or other development partner institution implementing the activity, or are elements of the results wholly outside of their control?

If the result is outside of their control, further analysis is needed of what actions are required or of the validity of any assumptions underlying the actions to be taken. For example, in considering action to improve availability of and access to food, it should be stated in the plan that success depends on road infrastructure being maintained and steadily improved, but that improvement of roads is not a part of the FSNS implementation.

- 2) Quantifiable indicators should be set to adequately measure each of the results. The indicators should, ideally, allow one to attribute change in an indicator to specific actions taken under the FSNS. Indicators should be kept to a minimum to save costly data collection. Moreover, close attention needs to be paid to how the data will be collected and by whom.

Once a set of proposed indicators have been established, initial data on the indicators should be collected to test their quality, reliability, and validity for the purposes of monitoring progress and managing activities under the action plan. Thereafter, baseline conditions will be set (present conditions) from which targets (both interim and final) for the action plan can be developed.

The importance of this step of establishing indicators in planning action under the FSNS should not be minimized – these indicators force serious attention by program

designers and implementers as to what needs to be done to attaining the target levels for each.

Implementing and revising the action plan as it goes forward. The final step in designing the action plan is to assign clear responsibility for the implementation of each element and achieving specific results and to establish how review and revision of the plan will take place. The action plan must be revised as it moves from concept to action and later as the food security and nutrition situation in the country changes due to the activities undertaken under the FSNS or for reasons unrelated to the strategy and its action plan.

The Technical Committee through the Secretariat must obtain concrete commitments from all organizations that will be responsible for achieving each result specified in the action plan. In the matrix in the second annex to this document, the government ministries and organizations in Liberia that tentatively will be responsible for implementing the various priorities and specific aims of the Strategy have already been listed. This list will be revised as the action plan is developed. In addition, individuals must be identified who will lead the effort to reach each interim and final targets under each activity described in the action plan. It is to be expected that the initial action plan will be adjusted in the process of doing so. As part of this process, budgets need to be identified and negotiated to insure that appropriate budget authority accompanies the responsibility and accountability for parts of the strategy that has been given to the various government ministries and agencies and organizations.

Finally, it is necessary in this last step of formulating the action plan to decide on the mechanism through which progress will be assessed as implementation proceeds, and who will revise the plans, budgets, and personnel where and when changes are seen to be needed. For instance, how will communities help revise the program? Perhaps by having open forums at county level where results are discussed and plans for revision can be suggested by anyone present. Consideration will also need to be paid to how members of the Technical Committee will participate in such reviews.

In parallel with the development of the action plan, the Ministry of Agriculture will act to establish the full Technical Committee and secretariat. One of the first actions of the full Council will be to review and endorse the action plan developed by the action planning team.

In order to provide the Technical Committee members with a clear understanding of how the action plan will be implemented, it is recommended that a formal logical framework analysis document of the action plan be developed for presentation to the Technical Committee. This logframe document would specify the hierarchy of objectives and targets under the action plan, the nature of the actions to be taken, including the time frame and who will be responsible for each, and how those actions are expected to lead to the attainment of the objectives and targets. This document should also provide an indication of how financial and human resources for the activities to be carried out under action plan will be identified and mobilized. Finally, it should specify the institutional mechanisms through which the implementation of the action plan will be managed, including the particular roles for the full Technical Committee, and the secretariat.

Annex 2 – Matrix of priority action areas proposed for the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy

Strategic Priority	Time horizon	Responsible Agency	Other Agencies	Capacity Needs
OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE STRATEGY				
All Liberians are able to have reliable access to the food they need and to utilize that food to live active and healthy lives	Throughout	Food Security & Nutrition Technical Committee Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Broad set of government sectors and agencies Civil society and private sector organizations Local & international NGOs Development partners of government	Expand staff and expertise across broad set of sectors. Build professional skills in: public health nutrition; food security monitoring; & food and nutrition policy analysis.
SPECIFIC AIMS				
<u>Enhancing food availability</u>				
Formulate policy statement on rice self-reliance	Short	Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee	Expertise in food policy analysis.
Exploit all opportunities for food production, address production constraints	Medium to long	Ministry of Agriculture	Farmer organizations Large-scale agricultural enterprises Private input traders NGOs working in agriculture and food security	Expansion of agricultural sector staff and skills, particularly in extension. Seed multiplication services; improved supply. Research on improved household food storage and preservation.
Improve post-harvest processing	Short to medium	Marketers, private sector	Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ministry of Agriculture NGOs involved in employment creation Financial or other credit institutions	Skills in running mills, managing milling business.
Diversify food produced	Medium to long	Ministry of Agriculture	Ministry of Health & Social Welfare Marketers	Skills in production of new crops and livestock
Safeguard communal property resources	Medium to long	Ministry of Internal Affairs	Forestry Development Authority Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Justice District and community-level authorities Marketers	Natural resource monitoring skills. Policing and regulatory capacity.
Maintain predictable and stable food imports	Short to medium	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Rice importers Rice wholesalers and Marketers Bureau of Customs Ministry of Agriculture LISGIS	Expertise in food policy analysis.

Strategic Priority	Time horizon	Responsible Agency	Other Agencies	Capacity Needs
Make appropriate use of international food assistance	Medium to long	National Food Assistance Agency Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs	Development partners providing food assistance NGOs using food assistance Ministry of Health and Social Welfare Ministry of Education Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Public Works Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Expertise in food security and food policy analysis.
Strengthen strategic food reserve mechanisms	Short	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Ministry of Finance Central Bank of Liberia	Expertise in food policy analysis and in food stock management.
<u>Improving access to food</u>				
Broaden secure access to factors of production	Medium to long	Governance Reform Commission Ministry of Labor Ministry of Agriculture	Ministry of Internal Affairs District and community-level authorities Marketers and private input traders NGOs working in agriculture and food security	Expertise in land tenure reform. Increased levels of adapted agricultural research. Improved seed supply. Expanded & enhanced agricultural extension.
Improve agricultural markets	Medium	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Ministry of Agriculture Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation and other parastatal organizations responsible for cash crops. Large scale cash crop processors and exporters Large scale industrial and agricultural firms Marketers Ministry of Public Works Ministry of Gender and Development Ministry of Information Liberian Marketing Association	Expertise in: agricultural marketing, private market development, market information systems.
Strengthen social safety nets	Medium to long	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	District and community-level authorities Development partners and NGOs working in social protection Community-based organizations – traditional, churches, mosques, youth or women's groups, etc. Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Gender and Development	Expertise in the design and targeting of social safety net programs.
<u>Better food utilization and improved nutritional status</u>				
Promote child growth	Short to medium	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Community-based organizations District and community-level authorities Development partners providing food assistance Development partners and NGOs working in health and social protection	Expertise in training of public health professionals, particularly in nutrition. Identification and management of public resources that can be used for growth promotion.

Strategic Priority	Time horizon	Responsible Agency	Other Agencies	Capacity Needs
Take essential nutrition actions	Short to medium	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Community-based organizations Development partners and NGOs working in health	Expertise in training of public health professionals, particularly in nutrition. Clinical nutrition skills.
Save the acutely malnourished	Short to medium	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Community-based organizations Development partners and NGOs working in health	Clinical nutrition skills. Expertise in community therapeutic feeding.
Increase access to safe water, sanitation, and proper housing	Medium to long	Ministry of Public Works Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation	Community-based organizations Development partners and NGOs working in health, water & sanitation, and housing District and community-level authorities	Engineering expertise. Financial resources, including credit for private provision of these services.
Improve care	Medium to long	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare Ministry of Education	Ministry of Gender and Development Ministry of Information Ministry of Labor Community-based organizations Development partners and NGOs working in health, education, women and children issues	Expertise in the development and dissemination of behavior change communication materials. Expertise in the development of life-skills training materials for use with school children and teenagers out of school.
Address food and nutrition needs related to HIV infection	Medium to long	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Development partners and NGOs working in health, particularly on HIV issues Ministry of Agriculture	Expertise in the nutritional care of HIV+ individuals and in the prevention of the transmission of the HIV virus from an infected mother to her child.
Fortify foods	Medium	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Ministry of Agriculture Development partners and NGOs working on nutrition issues Private food industries	Technical knowledge of industrial food fortification. Design of iodized salt regulations.
Enforce food standards	Medium	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of Commerce and Industry Development partners and NGOs working on nutrition issues Private food industries	Expertise in the enforcement of fortification standards.
Diversify diets	Medium to long	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Education NGOs working on nutrition issues	Knowledge to maximize micronutrient intake through foods – food choice, processing methods, complementary foods.
<u>Enabling factors</u>				
Meet capacity needs	Short to long	Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs	Ministry of Education University of Liberia and other institutions of higher education	Expertise to identify and prioritize capacity gaps. Develop capacity building plans, differentiating broad staffing needs from needs for specialized expertise.

Strategic Priority	Time horizon	Responsible Agency	Other Agencies	Capacity Needs
Improve knowledge on household food security and local diets	Medium to long	University of Liberia	Other Liberian institutions of higher education. Foreign research institutes with expertise in anthropology, human geography, rural sociology, agricultural economics, public health nutrition, and food science. Int'l NGOs with strong research components	Identify and prioritize knowledge gaps, particularly those for which there is evidence of changes as a result of the years of crises
Strengthen community-level action	Medium to long	Community and district authorities	Community-level organizations District Development Committees and local political representatives County authorities Ministry of Internal Affairs Broad range of government sectors and agencies, national and international NGOs, and civil society organizations working at community level	Determine how communities can effectively take charge of meeting their development needs – What community governance reforms might be needed? What capacity needs to be in place for appropriate planning and to mobilize action? What mechanisms can best link community mobilizers to facilitators?
<u>Establish institutional framework for strategy implementation</u>				
Institute the Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee	Short to medium	Ministry of Agriculture	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; Ministry of Commerce and Industry etc.	Institutional analysis to specify the design of the FSNTC. Expert in policy and budget analysis to manage the FSNTC secretariat. Legal assistance on the drafting of any legal instruments for the FSNTC
Establish food security and nutrition monitoring system	Medium	Ministry of Agriculture	Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services National Information Management Center Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ministry of Health and Social Welfare Government agencies, NGOs, and other organization working at district and county level that regularly collect information pertinent to food security and nutrition monitoring.	Experts in food security and nutrition monitoring and analysis. Institutional analysis to specify how the needed data will be collected, collated from the various agencies, and analyzed. Expertise to establish the skills, mechanisms, and material resources necessary to carry out food security and nutrition monitoring and analysis