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Policy brief: Nine pathways towards building resilient food systems in South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State

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Food Systems Resilience (FSR) Hub, Eastern Equatoria State (EES)

This policy brief is the outcome of the first Food Systems Resilience (FSR) Hub event organised and facilitated by the University of Juba and Wageningen University in EES. In total around seventy-five participants, representing the government, UN agencies, academia, NGOs, private sector, CBOs, civil society and the community, participated in the FSR Dialogue and Pathway Development (FoSReD-PaD) which took place in Torit on November 8-15 2022.

Eastern Equatoria's FSR Hub is a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together actors and stakeholders interested and dedicated to building the resilience of the state's food systems, in face of man-made and natural shocks impacting those systems, for improved food and nutrition (through healthier diets) outcomes. The FSR Hub provides a neutral and independent platform for information sharing, documenting good practice, joint learning, and the development of policy briefs.

One of the objectives of the FSR Hub is to create a shared understanding of how food systems behave,

change, and produce outcomes. This includes reflecting on current performance and outcomes; identifying opportunities; and addressing challenges to strengthen FSR to improve food and nutrition security outcomes, particularly in areas with high numbers of people in food crisis or worse (IPC3 and above).

Analysis of Eastern Equatoria State's FSR

The dialogue facilitated through the FSR Hub was grounded in analysis of available information and data on the state's food systems. Based on this, dialogue participants co-created a shared understanding of how the state's food systems change in the face of shocks and stressors, its current performance and its outcomes. From this a vision was created of food systems resilience in EES, and pathways devised to realise the vision.

The FSR Dialogue and Pathway Development

The FSR Dialogue and Pathway Development (FoSRd-PaD) report is available at <https://research.wur.nl/en/publications/food-systems-resilience-dialogue-and-pathway-development-eastern->

Its vision, co-created and approved upon by the dialogue participants, is as follows:

The peoples of EES produce and access sufficient nutritious and culturally accepted food over time and space, in the face of man-made and/or natural shocks and stressors and live in peace and harmony with each other and with nature.

The mission is as follows:

Building resilient food systems in EES, so that these - even in fragile contexts - are able to cope with, adapt to and transform in face of the shocks and stressors that impact the food systems of the state's diverse people groups.

In total nine pathways were envisaged by the dialogue participants. Taken together, the pathways comprise a road map for the transformation of Eastern Equatoria's food systems to become more resilient and produce better outcomes, in particular improved food security and nutrition through healthier diets.

The nine pathways for building resilient food systems in South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State

This policy brief documents the nine pathways that were discussed and agreed upon during the dialogue facilitated by key food systems actors and stakeholders.

The pathways are grounded in, and contribute to:

- The key priority dimensions for building FSR, as identified by South Sudan's National Food Systems Dialogues (2021).
- South Sudan's Comprehensive Agricultural Master Plan – CAMP.
- The Eastern Equatoria State Development Plan 2022-24.

They address critical challenges related to governance (policy, principled approaches); coordination; public and private sector performance and programming (including key operations and services in food system development); and capacity building.

The pathways take a principled approach, to:

- strengthen localisation and humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming.
- encourage and facilitate community-driven initiatives.
- ensure inclusivity so all (especially women and youth) can participate in and benefit equitably.
- see youth as an opportunity.
- seek constructive engagement of local experts to strengthen local knowledge/research infrastructure.

Each pathway elaborates the challenges, ambitions, and the strategic interventions required (all of them identified through the dialogue).

The first three pathways focus on governance. They are followed by four pathways aligned with the four national priorities in transforming the country's food systems; pathway 8, aligned with the national call to action on seed systems;¹ and pathway 9, to build capacities for the evidence-based adaptive programming needed in volatile and dynamic contexts.

Pathways 1-3: governance

1. Strengthen FSR governance and programming.
2. Strengthen FSR coordination, digital inclusion and partnerships.
3. Promote the transition from humanitarian assistance to building FSR.

Pathways 4-7: South Sudan's food system transformation priorities

1. Strengthen FSR in the face of human-made and natural shocks.
2. Build FSR that contributes to social cohesion and peace ~ developing food systems for peace.
3. Build FSR that maintains/restores/develops natural resources and produces a variety of foods for delivering healthier diets.
4. Promote food systems that maximise youth employment by developing inclusive value chains and agribusinesses.

Pathway 8: Seed systems transformation priorities

1. Develop a resilient seed sector in EES.

Pathway 9: Learning, capacity building and evidence-based programming

1. Facilitate learning, build capacities of public and private institutions, and encourage evidence-based programming for effective food system transformation.

¹ <https://issdafrica.org/2023/04/05/south-sudan-building-a-robust-inclusive-sustainable-and-resilient-seed-sector/>

Pathway 1: Strengthen food systems resilience (FSR) governance and programming

Challenges:

Key actors identified the following key challenges through the dialogue:

- Poor co-ordination between national and state government, and between state line ministries and humanitarian/development/peace partners.
- Poor skills/expertise in strengthening FSR governance amongst government staff and partners.
- Lack of appropriate policies and principled approaches on guiding FSR.
- Lack of credible data and information for evidence base planning and policy development on FSR.
- NGOs act in competition with each other to access funding, rather than co-operating in the public domain.
- Lack of early warning systems and anticipatory action.

Ambitions:

Key actors identified the following key ambitions through the dialogue:

- To increase the political interest and will to strengthen FSR governance (policy development and implementation), improve co-ordination between national/state government and between state government and humanitarian/development/peace actors.
- To enhance efforts of the National Bureau of Statistics and the universities in generating and dissemination of credible data and information on building FSR.
- For agencies to work and collaborate/co-ordinate towards common goal building FSR (rather than acting in competition with each other to access funding).
- For FSR governance frameworks and principles to provide a solid foundation for area-based development, including peace building and reconciliation.
- To involve academia and national/local experts in FSR governance and programming.
- To establish early warning systems, including provisions for anticipatory action.

Strategic interventions:

Key actors identified the following strategic interventions:

1. **Develop a better understanding of FSR**, both as a concept and as an actionable approach amongst key stakeholders/actors, and **develop a common principled approach to building/developing FSR** in EES.
2. **Clarify the role of key stakeholders and actors** in EES in developing FSR.
3. **Produce a land use management map / plan (including hazard/risk mapping)** to guide and inform decision-making by EES Government to achieve the potential of South Sudan's food system

transformation priorities (aligned with the Comprehensive Agricultural Master Plan).

4. **Develop policy directions and operational approaches to the realisation of the four national priority areas to transform South Sudan's food systems.** That is, to develop evidence-based food systems that: 1) are resilient to man-made natural shocks/stressors; 2) contribute to social cohesion and peace; 3) produce healthier diets and improved NRM; 4) develop value chains that are inclusive and generate meaningful youth employment.
5. Government to **ensure that national and international public & private investments in agriculture are 'responsible'**, and in line with the interest of communities in Eastern Equatoria.
6. **Ensure government and donor funding is aimed at building FSR.**

Pathway 2: Strengthen FSR coordination, digital inclusion and partnerships

Challenges:

- Communication and information sharing between key actors and stakeholders is generally poor; it needs dedicated attention to improve for FSR work to be co-ordinated and effective.
- Lack of commitment/ability by government to effectively deliver co-ordination.
- Lack of funding to make co-ordination, information-sharing and fostering partnerships possible.
- Poor physical infrastructure and communication making dialogues/meetings expensive and challenging (in particular for those not located in Torit).

Ambitions:

- To establish a platform at state level that can bring together a wide range of key actors/stakeholders, interested in and dedicated towards building resilient food systems in EES, and foster partnerships dedicated to building FSR.
- To set up a digital platform to increase access to relevant information (for example by setting up places with good internet access at County level).
- To make co-ordination meetings involving relevant authorities stronger and more effective.
- To identify and secure the funds required to make co-ordination and information-sharing possible.

Strategic interventions:

1. **Establish a FSR Hub in EES in Torit.** The FSR Hub provides an independent and neutral platform that brings together a wide range of key actors/stakeholders interested in and dedicated towards building resilient food systems in EES; the FSR Hub will raise awareness about the importance of FSR, provide training, facilitate learning, co-ordinate and facilitate joint or collaborative action, document

- good practice, and develop policy briefs advocating for building FSR.
2. **Establish a FSR Portal** as a digital platform/gateway to share FSR-related policies, food systems regulatory provisions and requirements, information on on-going food systems programmes and their focus areas, and other FSR-related information.
 3. **Establish a FSR training and resource centre** that develops and delivers training/info/resources packages to address critical challenges/gaps in building FSR.
 4. **Strengthen and promote longer-term partnerships on FSR** between local, national, regional and international universities and research centres.

Pathway 3: Promote the transition from humanitarian assistance to building FSR

Challenges:

- The mindset and attitude of organisations and communities that have become accustomed to provision of humanitarian assistance.
- Lack of participatory planning processes and project formulation which are often not in the public domain.
- Lack of will, ideas and power to transform humanitarian assistance to developing FSR.
- Lack of commonly-accepted principled approaches to guide transformation of humanitarian assistance into building FSR.
- Poor infrastructure and market linkages form barriers towards building FSR.

Ambitions:

- To create a shared vision amongst key actors on the need and opportunity to transform humanitarian assistance into building FSR.
- To develop principled approaches on the transformation of humanitarian assistance with key actors committed to its application.

Strategic interventions:

1. Create awareness and commitment amongst organisations/communities to **transition out of humanitarian assistance to building FSR**.
2. Facilitate a consultative process to **develop a set of guiding principles for humanitarian assistance to catalysing FSR** (in line with the localisation agenda & HDP-nexus programming).
3. **Employ data literacy/analytics/foresight to support decentralised programming and decision-making**.

4. **Facilitate and support a central role for education/training/research institutions and South Sudanese and HoA experts** in the transformation of humanitarian assistance, and simultaneously strengthen the capacity of these education/training/research institutions.

Pathway 4: Strengthen FSR in the face of human-made and natural shocks

The Challenges:

- Poor safety and insecurity resulting in displacement (in parts of EES) undermining food systems.
- Long dry spells causing drought impact crop/livestock production and wildfires burning out of control.
- Flooding disrupting agricultural production and causing displacement.
- Crop pest and animal diseases.
- An absence of concerted efforts/approaches to strengthen food systems in the face of these shocks and stressors.

The Ambitions:

- For EES' food systems to be more resilient in the face of recurrent shocks and stressors, with government, agencies and local communities better able to anticipate and mitigate the potential impact of these shocks and stressors and respond and recover from these shocks and stressors.

Strategic interventions²:

FSR Governance and institutional strengthening

1. **Create better awareness and understanding amongst key actors/stakeholders on how man-made and natural shocks/stressors impact on food systems** and develop action (response and recovery) and appropriate anticipatory action (mitigation/reduction and early warning/readiness).
2. As part of the land use management map / plan (pathway 1) **visualise key hazards and risks geographically and describe key food systems' components and interactions**.
3. **Establish a cost-effective and affordable early warning system** including provisions for anticipatory action (mitigation/reduction and early warning/readiness).
4. **Develop a drought/flood/forced displacement risk mitigation and response plan** (see pathway 1).
5. **Develop courses/workshops addressing critical gaps in developing FSR**.

² This policy brief observes the strategic levers identified by South Sudan's National Food Systems Summit

Enhancing communities' food production

6. **Develop and promote community-based institutions that allow programming/ interventions reflecting local needs and preferences, building upon, and strengthening, local capacities.**
7. **Develop appropriate training and resource packages that support production of nutritious foods,** fitting EES's agro-ecologies and cultural preferences.
8. **Identify and develop scaling strategies to increase crop production** with the potential to 1) reduce the food gap and to 2) contribute to healthier diets.

Facilitation of storage and transportation of food products

9. **Strengthen rural-urban food systems,** moving beyond direct production-marketing.
10. **Develop strategy/principled approach for post-harvest management,** in particular local storage to reduce post-harvest losses.
11. **Invest in road infrastructure** (domestic food from food surplus to deficit areas).
12. **Develop market infrastructure** (to link demand and supply of domestic food).
13. **Develop strategies to narrow the food gap with footprint actors** (in particular FAO and WFP) and NGOs in EES.

Pathway 5: Build FSR that contributes to social cohesion and peace ~ developing food systems for peace

Challenges:

- Conflicts between farmers and herders, contributing to competing interests and claims to access farmland and grazing areas.
- Food insecurity and its potential to contribute to conflict.
- Poor understanding of the cause-effect relationship between conflict and food insecurity; and therefore lack of smart/strategic programming.

Ambitions:

- To respect implement peace agreements.
- To establish inter-communal dialogues, especially in areas where food systems interact (in part livestock and cropping systems).
- To develop awareness and practical action to developing food systems in such ways that it contributes to social cohesion and peace.
- To develop and use evidence-based land use policies that contributes to social cohesion and peace.

Strategic interventions:

A. Develop community-based peace-building mechanisms

1. EES government and its partners to **institutionalise the state's peace architecture** as foundational to food systems transformation.
2. **Develop Food Systems for Peace (FS4P)** by creating a common foundation amongst key actors/stakeholders (including government) on conflict sensitivity, conflict transformation and peacebuilding and develop principles and practices to develop FS4P.
3. **Strengthen the EES's peace architecture** through application the **localisation agenda & humanitarian-development-peace nexus** programming.
4. EES Government and its partners to strengthen urban and rural communities **access to the rule of law and justice** to act as an antidote to impunity.

B. Build capacity for enhanced land tenure security

5. **Enhance land tenure security** by developing / making more explicit indigenous land use rights in EES's land rights, policies, and frameworks.
6. **Increase understanding on interaction of livestock and cropping systems** and how traditionally/current law land rights and tenure are being managed.

C. Community-driven development interventions

7. Deepen understanding of conflicts in impact on EES's food systems, to **devise strategies to avoid/minimise impact of conflicts on food systems.**
8. **Facilitate community-driven initiatives to developing food systems for peace.**
9. **Engage/dialogue with parties in areas where livestock and cropping systems** interact with potential for conflict.
10. Develop food systems in such ways that it will contribute to producing and making food available in sufficient quantities at favourable market prices (making food more affordable) and **develop the potential for food to bring people together and contribute to cohesion when access is sought.**

Pathway 6: Build FSR that maintains/restores/develops natural resources and produces a variety of foods for delivering healthier diets

Challenges:

- Poor management of natural resources.
- Lack of policies and principled approaches on NRM.

- Low to non-existing research capacity on NRM at state level.
- Cultural taboos and/or poor awareness of healthy foods by citizens of EES.
- Poor agricultural infrastructure, inadequate extension services and farmer organisation/co-operatives.

Ambitions:

- To develop and disseminate relevant policies, legislation and action points.
- To promote the sustainable management of natural resources/ecosystem so that the EES peoples are able to produce and access healthy foods.
- To strengthen social organisations to increase agricultural production and crop diversity in line with peoples' cultural preferences.

Strategic interventions:

A. Food diversification through farmer / herder / women's / youth organisations and cooperatives

1. **Inventorise the current crop portfolio** in EES across the main agro-ecological settings.
2. Develop a principled approach to **support food diversification** through CBOs and co-operatives with particular attention for the role of women.
3. Aim for **increased food production and supply** by working with farmers (in particular women), agripastoralists and herders, in ways that promote the sustainable use and management of natural resources.
4. **Establish a training and demonstration centre** (training instructors, lead farmers and youth), including demonstration plots in selected areas, through the University of Juba/Yei CTC, with a focus on training lead farmers and youth.

B. Support responsible public and private investment

5. Government to **ensure that national and international public and private investments in agriculture are 'responsible'**, and in line with the interest of communities in Eastern Equatoria.
6. Guide/help agribusiness and financial intermediaries to **make investment decisions that increase the resilience of food systems.**
7. **Ensure food safety and quality standards**, in part for imported foods.

C. Awareness and knowledge related to nutrition and healthy diets

8. Raise awareness and design comprehensive approach to **develop food systems for healthier diets.**
9. **Diversify crop production** for healthier diets.
10. **Introduce and promote new crops / crop varieties** that have the potential to contribute to healthy diets.

D. Enhance the nutrition of children and infants

11. **Enhance awareness and knowledge related to healthy diets and nutrition** for infants and children.

E. Develop animal value chains

12. **Aim for increased food production and supply** by working with livestock producers to develop economic value of livestock.

Pathway 7: Promote food systems that maximise youth employment by developing inclusive value chains and agribusinesses

Challenges:

- Poorly functioning markets and poor market information systems on demand and supply.
- Lack of access to capital for value chain / agribusiness development.
- Poor agriculture-related infrastructure (such as roads, processing and storage facilities) in support of value chain development.
- Lack of or inadequate agricultural inputs (like tools and high-quality seeds).
- Lack of decision-making power (and access to resources) by youth and women; gender as well as inter-generational household power dynamics.
- Youth are seen as having a negative attitude to involve in agricultural value chain development and agribusiness activities/enterprises.

Ambitions:

- For the Government, with support of key actors, to take the lead to develop a vision and policy to support development of value chains and establish agribusiness incubation hubs.
- To improve market linkages (including investment in critical road and communication infrastructure) linking supply with demand, that supports small agribusiness and value chain development, adding value over different stages of the chain.
- To develop a vision and strategies (including inter-generational power relations) promoting youth involvement as an opportunity in small agribusiness and value chain development.
- For the Government and partners to provide skills training through TVETs and adult education.

Strategic interventions:

A. Innovative financial institutions/mechanisms

1. Enhance **access to financial resources.**

B. Small-medium business/enterprises

2. **Promote small business development.**

C. Inclusive value chain development (maximising youth involvement)

3. **Identify and develop strategic value chains** in an inclusive manner, maximising youth employment.
4. Access seed money to **develop models of inclusive value chain development that maximise youth employment** that can serve as 'investment vehicles'.
5. **Develop the ToT network in value chain identification and development** at universities/training centres.
6. **Create a challenge/development fund** for the community-driven/private sector incubating start-ups in value chain development and agribusiness.
7. **Encourage (peer) exchange visits, knowledge sharing, and learning.**

Pathway 8: Develop a resilient seed sector in Eastern Equatoria State

Challenges:

The National Seed Systems Dialogue identified the following:

- Seed systems are not resilient. The focus by the international community is on formal seed systems and intermediate seed systems (in particular seed relief); most farmers (around 85%) depend on the informal seed sector (such as farmer-saved seed, social seed networks and local seed markets), while there is however little to no interest/investment in such systems.
- Overall, actors in the seed sector often do not have the required knowledge and expertise as seed is seen as part of food security. Therefore, awareness-raising on seed systems is crucial, including assessment reports that provide insights on seed systems performance and programming options to strengthen the resilience of seed systems depending on local context and foresight.

The following key challenges were identified as part of the Eastern Equatoria State-level Food Systems Dialogue:

- Absence of a seed policy framework to guide and promote state level seed sector development.
- Inadequate expertise to carry out research and crop breeding.
- Weather extremes and climate change require seed to promote drought/flood-proof crop varieties and introduction of new crops.
- Lack of access to credit to invest in and develop the seed sector.

Ambitions:

- To establish a resilient integrated seed sector in support of a sustainable food system, producing a variety of healthy foods.

- To develop a more resilient seed sector in Eastern Equatoria, to improve timely access to seed varieties/classes needed and wanted by farmers for affordable prices.
- To develop seed systems focusing on main staple crops, vegetables (including indigenous vegetables), and fodder and forage for livestock.
- To establish a resilient seed sector, established with the capacity to produce high quality seeds for local, national and regional markets.

Strategic interventions:

1. Contribute to and benefit from the **national seed policy and seed regulatory framework.**
2. Strengthen **seed sector coordination, information sharing (digital inclusion), and partnerships.**
3. Support the **transition from seed relief to seed sector development.**
4. Strengthen **farmer-based seed systems.**
5. Support the development of the **private seed sector.**
6. Establish a **decentralised seed quality assurance system.**
7. Establish a state **gene bank linked to community seed banks** and the national gene bank.
8. Strengthen **crop breeding** and introduction to **new varieties.**
9. Establish **public-private partnerships in foundation seed production.**
10. Build capacity of **key government departments and public institutes.**

Pathway 9: Facilitate learning, build the capacities of public and private institutions, and encourage evidence-based programming for effective food systems transformation

Challenges:

- Limited opportunities to learning on FSR; limited knowledge/experience on FSR.
- The low capacity of education and training in the state to build the relevant knowledge and skills of staff.
- The lack of coordination amongst learning institutions, NGOs and CSOs.
- The lack of training centres and research centres at state level for capacity building.
- No culture on evidence-based programming.

Ambitions:

- To develop a conducive environment, with opportunities for learning and putting learning into practice, by establishing functional training and research zonal stations.
- To capacitate public and private institutions to support building FSR that contributes to vibrant and dynamic communities.

- To support community-driven initiatives and establish evidence-based programming as the norm.

Strategic interventions:

A. Learning

FSR Training and Resource Centre and Disaster Risk Management (DRM)

1. **Establishment of a FSR Training and Resource Centre** in a central location in Torit.
2. **Develop and provide technical training and invest in capacity building.**
3. The University of Juba and Yei CTC to **develop competence-based ToT courses** in close consultation with and support from research/training institutes and the NGO sector in EES.
4. The University of Juba, together with a state level university or college to **build capacity in the field of DRM** and promotion of integrated risk management.
5. Encourage a culture of exchange / field visitations that facilitates **joint learning, documenting good practice and the development of policy recommendations.**

Vocational / business skill training

6. **Establish/strengthen technical and vocational education and training (TVET)** including practical training grounds.
7. **Establish TVETs at each of the five agro-ecological zones** in Eastern Equatoria, co-ordinated with the support of the University of Juba.

B. Capacity building and career path development

8. **Make available a list of training, studies and courses** that build key knowledge and skills to develop FSR; lobby donors and programmes to avail scholarships.
9. **Invest in and develop critical human resources** for universities, training centres and private sector.
10. **Offer career trajectories for students and junior staff of institutions** by offering internships/thesis research/action research opportunities in programmes that contribute to building resilience, especially I/NGOs and UN agencies including WFP and FAO.

C. Evidence-based programming

11. **Encourage and facilitate evidence-based programming.**

Conclusions

The dialogue established that there is an urgent need to transform Eastern Equatoria's food systems so that these are able to cope with, adapt to and transform in face of the shocks and stressors that impact the food systems of the state's diverse people groups.

The nine pathways provide a road map to transform Eastern Equatoria's food systems through strategic interventions to build their resilience.

For foods systems to be resilient they must be relevant to the current context of rural (and, increasingly, urban) communities; sensitive to the major shocks and stressors impacting systems; and envision the development of food systems that are of fundamental importance to a more stable and peaceful Eastern Equatoria State and South Sudan.

Contributing organisations

The following organisations have participated in the dialogue and subscribe to its findings, including the vision, the mission, the nine pathways and the strategic interventions to be acted upon to build EES State's food systems resilience:

Government: State Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Environment; State Ministry of Animal Resources, Fisheries & Tourism; State Ministry of Peace Building; State Relief and Rehabilitation Commission; State Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development; State Ministry of Trade and Investment; State Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports; State Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; State Ministry of Housing, Lands, Planning & Utility; State Ministry of Information & Telecommunication; National Bureau of Standards.

Academia: University of Juba; University of Wageningen; University of Tilburg; Netherlands Food Partnership; Equatorial International University.

UN agencies: UNMISS, FAO, WFP, UNHCR, UNDP.

NGOs: ACTED; Ark for Humanity; AVSI, Cordaid; Care International; Caritas Luxemburg; Caritas Suisse; Global Aim; Plan International; Save the Children International; South Sudan Red Cross; Tear Fund; Welthungerhilfe.

Private sector: Chamber of Commerce; Torit County Cooperative Union; Afrogenics.

Civil society: Logire Cooperative Union; Eastern Equatoria Women Association; Youth Union.

Organisation and contact

For any further questions, please contact: Dr Tony Ngalamu (email: tnagalamu@wacci.ug.edu.gh), the University of Juba; or Dr Gerrit-Jan van Uffelen (email: gerrit-jan.vanuffelen@wur.nl), Wageningen University and Research, in particular its Centre for Development Innovation.



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