



CASE STUDY

THE COALITION OF ACTION ON HEALTHY DIETS FROM SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS FOR CHILDREN AND ALL (HDSFS)

# ADVANCING NUTRITION THROUGH AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

## SIERRA LEONE'S FEED SALONE INITIATIVE

Photo: FAO/Sebastian Liste

### Country Context: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Food Systems

Sierra Leone holds substantial agricultural potential, underpinned by abundant water resources, fertile soils, and diverse agro-ecological zones. Nourished by seven major rivers and extensive inland valley swamplands, the country is well positioned to expand domestic food production. At present, however, only about 15% of its fertile land is cultivated due to long-standing structural constraints (1), i.e. low productivity, limited access to finance, skill gaps and underdeveloped value chains. Unlocking Sierra Leone's agricultural potential requires tackling these constraints along with others such as low mechanizations and high post-harvest losses. Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Sierra Leone's economy and food security, employing a large share of the population, pointing to significant opportunities for productivity gains through target investments, skills development and value chain strengthening.

In parallel, Sierra Leone's fiscal space for investing in agriculture, nutrition, and food systems is constrained by a heavy public debt burden. High debt servicing obligations divert limited public resources away from productive investments, while borrowing costs for low-income countries remain significantly higher than those faced by high-income economies. This structural imbalance limits the government's ability to finance long-term investments in food systems transformation, even where political commitment exists. Addressing food security and nutrition challenges in this context therefore requires not only domestic policy coherence, but also supportive international financing conditions that enable countries like Sierra Leone to invest in sustainable, nutrition-sensitive development (2). At the same time, climate change poses a serious and growing threat to agriculture in Sierra Leone, manifesting through erratic rainfall, droughts, and floods. These climate pressures, combined with global economic volatility, create an increasingly unstable environment for food production and livelihoods. In this context, a business-as-usual, production-focused approach is insufficient. What is required is a systems-wide transformation that connects agriculture, nutrition, social protection, climate action, trade,

and education - linking production, markets, and consumption from farm to fork. All these agri-food system challenges, coupled with health system constraints and the impacts of climate change, affect the nutritional status of Sierra Leone's population. Nutrition challenges are multifaceted, marked by the coexistence of child undernutrition and a growing burden of diet-related health risks. Alongside these pressures, some important areas of progress have been observed. For example, exclusive breastfeeding among infants under six months increased from 31.2% in 2012 to 50.9% in 2023; low birthweight declined from 11.4% in 2012 to 10.3% in 2020; and stunting fell from 33.3% in 2012 to 25.2% in 2024. Still, challenges persist. Anemia affects 44.6% of women of reproductive age (2023), the country remains off-track to address overweight among children under five (5.4% in 2024), and the share of the population unable to afford a healthy diet increased from 57.2% in 2019 to 62.9% in 2024. Non-communicable diseases are also an increasing concern. While comprehensive up-to-date national data on specific conditions such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease are limited, surveillance from 2009 indicates NCDs accounted for an estimated 18% of all deaths in Sierra Leone (3).



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Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems for Children and All

Obesity affected 7.1% of adults in 2022, up from 5.8% in 2012, and data from the International Diabetes Federation indicate that the number of adults living with diabetes has more than doubled between 2011 and 2024 and is projected to continue rising in the coming decades (4). Further adding to these pressures, the lingering economic impacts of COVID-19, ongoing global food supply disruptions, and currency depreciation have driven food price increases, intensifying risks for households already facing nutritional vulnerability (5). Together, these trends reinforce the need for food systems-wide transformation that ensures not only greater food availability, but improved access to nutritious, diverse, and affordable diets for all (6).

Against this backdrop, the Government of Sierra Leone launched Feed Salone in October 2023 as a flagship initiative to transform the country's agri-food system through a holistic, coordinated approach. This case study explores how Feed Salone operates as a mechanism to strengthen policy coherence and linking agendas aimed at promoting healthy and sustainable diets. It adopts a qualitative methodology, combining Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with a literature review to examine conceptual themes, assess implementation dynamics and progress, and identify remaining challenges. Interviews were conducted with 14 stakeholders across sectors at national level in Freetown and in four districts – Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Kambia – to capture diverse policy design and implementation perspectives.

To further amplify its focus on healthy diets outcomes within food systems transformation, Sierra Leone joined the [Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems for Children and All \(HDSFS\)](#) in 2024 and is currently serving as the Steering Committee Chair (2025-2026). The country is represented by two focal points - the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement focal point in the Office of the Vice President and the Director of Food and Nutrition in the Ministry of Health and Sanitation - reflecting high-level, cross-sectoral ownership of the healthy diets agenda. This engagement complements national efforts under Feed Salone by reinforcing nutrition as a shared priority across government and by linking Sierra Leone's domestic reforms to global learning and collaboration.

## The Feed Salone initiative

Launched in October 2023, the Feed Salone Initiative is the Government of Sierra Leone's flagship response to interconnected agri-food system challenges. Rather than addressing food production, nutrition, markets, and climate resilience in isolation, it represents a strategic commitment to a more efficient, equitable, sustainable, and nutrition-sensitive food system transformation. The initiative was shaped through inclusive national dialogues involving stakeholders across finance, production, processing, marketing, policy, and climate adaptation, ensuring broad participation and shared ownership.

The overarching objective of Feed Salone is to achieve food security and improved nutrition for all Sierra Leoneans through a sustainable, climate-resilient, and economically viable agri-food system. The initiative is guided by *five strategic objectives*: 1. reducing import dependency; 2. boosting export earnings; 3. creating jobs; 4. alleviating hunger and malnutrition; and 5. strengthening climate resilience. Together, these objectives reflect a deliberate effort to link agriculture with nutrition, employment, trade, and climate action (7).

To operationalize these ambitions, Feed Salone is structured around *six strategic pillars*, responding to the long-standing structural constraints identified earlier: 1. mechanization and irrigation; 2. seed and input systems; 3. aggregation, processing, and market linkages; 4. agricultural finance; 5. agricultural technology and climate-smart agriculture; and 6. empowerment of women and youth. Each pillar serves as both a policy and operational entry point, enabling coordinated action by government institutions, civil society, the private sector, and development partners across the food system.

**What distinguishes Feed Salone from previous approaches is its explicit focus on policy coherence and alignment of incentives. Instead of treating agriculture, nutrition, markets, and consumer behavior as separate domains, the initiative seeks to simultaneously expand access to nutritious, locally produced foods; strengthen value chains and markets; improve food environments and demand for healthy diets; enhance climate resilience; promote inclusive economic growth; leverage public procurement (such as school feeding); and coordinate development partner support under a single national framework.**

Feed Salone is embedded within [Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030 \(MTNDP 24-30\)](#), where it is identified as one of five national "[Game Changers](#)" for economic transformation, alongside Human Capital Development, Youth Employment, Technology and Infrastructure, and Public Service reform.

Together, these priorities aim to accelerate inclusive growth while advancing progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (8). This alignment is reflected in [Sierra Leone's latest Voluntary National Review \(2024\) for the UN 2030 Agenda](#), which highlights Feed Salone as a central vehicle for advancing food security, nutrition, and sustainable development outcomes.

## Mechanisms for Coordination and Policy Coherence

Policy coherence does not emerge automatically. In Sierra Leone, it has been actively enabled through a set of institutional arrangements designed to align actors, resources, and decision-making around Feed Salone and the broader food systems agenda. From the outset, it was positioned as a whole-of-government initiative, aligned with national development priorities and grounded in multi-stakeholder engagement. Its design and implementation brings together government ministries (including Agriculture, Health, Finance, and Education), development partners (such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Bank (WB), and European Union (EU)), academic and research institutions (including Njala University, Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute, and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)), civil society organisations, and private sector actors. This collaborative model helps align interventions, reduce duplication, and mobilise complementary expertise across sectors. The importance of this approach is underscored by Ms. Frances Boima, Nutrition Officer at WFP Sierra Leone Country Office, who noted the following:

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*"The Feed Salone Initiative has maximized the impact of development partners by strengthening collaboration and ensuring effective coordination. This integrated approach prevents duplication of efforts that often occurs when organisations work in isolation."*

*Ms. Frances Boima, WFP Nutrition Officer, Sierra Leone*

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### Institutional Architecture for Coordination

Feed Salone is anchored within high-level political and administrative structures, signalling that food systems transformation is a national priority rather than a standalone sectoral programme. Key coordination mechanisms include:

- **Presidential Council and Ministerial Working Groups**, which provide strategic direction and political oversight.
- **Food Systems Coordination Unit and SUN Secretariat within the Office of the Vice President**, which serve as an institutional hub linking Feed Salone to national nutrition commitments and international food systems processes.
- **Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS)**, which leads technical implementation in close collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Education, Finance, Planning, and others.

Together, this governance architecture strengthens vertical and horizontal coordination, ensuring that policies and investments across sectors reinforce shared food systems objectives. Complementing this structure are several inter-institutional coordination platforms that create spaces for coordination, dialogue, and accountability across government and partners.

These include:

- **The Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Food Security**, chaired by MAFS, convenes key ministries (Agriculture and Food Security; Lands, Environment & Climate Change; Fisheries and Marine Resources; Justice, among others) to coordinate Feed Salone implementation and address food security challenges collectively.
- **The Development Partnership Committee (DEPAC)**, co-chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, works through sectoral working groups - including agriculture and food security - to help ensure that partner support reinforces Feed Salone and the five national "Game Changers" under the MTNDP 24-30.

### Budgeting, Staffing, and Investment as Signals of Commitment

Policy coherence is reinforced through budgetary decisions. Under Feed Salone, the national budget allocation to agriculture increased from 2% to 7% in 2024, with a stated target of at least 10% in the subsequent fiscal year (8) - aligning with Sierra Leone's commitments under the [Malabo Declaration](#) (9). In addition, funds have been allocated from the 2025 domestic capital budget to Feed Salone and the Government has invested in implementation capacity (10). The Ministry of Finance approved the creation of 1,000 new field-based positions dedicated to Feed Salone, including agricultural extension officers, livestock specialists, field data enumerators and programme monitoring staff (8). These investments reflect that Feed Salone is a government priority backed by financial resources, human capacity, and institutional authority.

## From Design to Practice: Examples of Cross-Sector Alignment

The experience of designing and operationalizing Feed Salone demonstrates that achieving policy coherence does not emerge by political will alone. Rather, it requires deliberate policy design through inclusive, well coordinated and interministerial processes around agreed and co-owned goals for the country. The three themes below demonstrate how this approach is being operationalized through cross-sectoral action, with particular attention to nutrition.

### Linking Agriculture, Nutrition, and Education

One of the clearest illustrations of cross-sectoral alignment for achieving shared objectives is the integration of the national School Feeding Programme (SFP) within Feed Salone, enabling a single delivery platform through which results and co-benefits can be achieved across agriculture, nutrition, and education. During the 2023-2024 academic year, the national SFP provided meals to more than 500,000 students, contributing to improved school attendance, learning outcomes, and child nutrition.

As part of Feed Salone's fourth strategic objective on reducing hunger and malnutrition, the MAFS worked closely with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and development partners to strengthen the nutritional contribution of school meals. In 2024, collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Korea and WFP helped expand coverage and stabilize food supplies for school feeding, reaching over 106,000 children across 500 schools nationwide.

Beyond ensuring caloric adequacy, Feed Salone has supported efforts to improve the quality and diversity of foods provided through school meals. Complementary WFP support enabled 207 schools in five districts to purchase fresh vegetables from local smallholder farmers, many of whom are women. This approach enhanced the nutritional value of meals while simultaneously supporting local livelihoods, strengthening market linkages, shortening food chains and reinforcing the connection between nutrition outcomes and domestic agricultural production.

Aligning Feed Salone with the national School Feeding Programme delivers multiple, reinforcing benefits across sectors. As Mr. Segbeh Coker, Director of Nutrition at the School Feeding Secretariat within the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, explains: ***"The Feed Salone strategy and the national school feeding programme function in a powerfully synergistic manner."*** He noted that, in practice, this alignment prioritizes the procurement of locally produced foods (such as staples, pulses, edible oils, and leafy vegetables) thereby improving the nutritional quality of school meals while boosting student enrollment and retention. At the same time, it strengthens domestic agricultural markets by increasing incomes for local farmers and reducing reliance on food imports. Together, these outcomes operationalize the ***"eat what you grow"*** principle and demonstrate how coordinated public procurement can advance nutrition, education, and local economic development simultaneously.

#### Aligning Production and Market Systems with Dietary Needs

Feed Salone's emphasis on value-chain development is guided by both food security and nutrition considerations. The prioritization of commodities such as rice, onions, poultry, cassava, orange-fleshed sweet potato, and vegetables reflects a dual strategy: stabilising staple food supplies while gradually expanding access to more nutritious and diverse foods. While foods like rice, onions, and cassava are central to food security and import substitution, crops such as orange-fleshed sweet potato and vegetables contribute more directly to improved dietary quality through increased micronutrient intake and dietary diversity. Investments in processing facilities, cold storage, feeder roads, and mechanised services support this approach by reducing post-harvest losses and improving year-round availability of perishable, nutrient-rich foods. In support of Feed Salone's first strategic objective of reducing dependence on imported foods, the programme prioritised three key value chains during its initial year: rice, poultry products, and onions.

Selected for their importance to domestic food supply and market demand, these value chains recorded early gains in 2023. In the rice sector, cultivated area expanded by 9.5% compared to the previous year, contributing to a 35.2% increase in paddy production, alongside improvements in post-harvest handling and processing capacity. This expansion benefited nearly 92,000 farmers, of whom 43.7% were women, underscoring the initiative's focus on inclusive growth (8). In combination with other initiatives, such as a national e-voucher scheme (11) for improved subsidized inputs and services to farmers, the country's rice self-sufficiency had risen to 64% in 2023, compared to 54% in 2019, reducing exposure to volatile international markets. These gains highlight the distinction between food security and nutrition security. While increased staple production is essential for reducing hunger, diversification toward nutrient-dense foods remains necessary to address different forms of malnutrition and improve diet quality. Prof. Abdulai Jalloh, Director and Chief Agriculture Officer at MAFS, highlights that foundational investments in infrastructure and finance have delivered measurable economic and food system gains, including higher domestic production, improved market functioning, and reduced reliance on imports. He noted that the Feed Salone Initiative has significantly increased production of key staples - rice, cassava, and orange-fleshed sweet potato - through a combination of targeted public investment, improved input access, strengthened delivery, and coordinated action across government, while rice remains the country's main staple food. Although comprehensive national dietary data are still being developed, early implementation experience and stakeholder observations suggest emerging shifts in food availability and dietary patterns. He emphasized that: ***"The program has encouraged a broader shift in consumption habits, with more people now opting for affordable, nutritious, and locally available foods, thereby enhancing dietary transparency and promoting healthier eating practices."*** Complementing these production and market interventions, Feed Salone has increasingly sought to embed nutrition considerations within its broader agricultural transformation agenda. This includes efforts to strengthen food safety systems, improve the nutritional quality of locally available foods, and ensure that gains in domestic production translate into better diets. Reflecting this orientation, Ms. Millicent Allie, Chief Nutritionist, Ministry of Health, said:

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***"The Feed Salone Initiative is positioned to substantially decrease malnutrition nationwide through its emphasis on locally sourced foods."***

*Ms. Millicent Allie, Chief Nutritionist, Ministry of Health*

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She noted that combining agricultural investments with practices such as exclusive breastfeeding and affordable, nutritious complementary foods made from local ingredients offers a more comprehensive pathway to improving nutrition outcomes in Sierra Leone.

### Linking Public Investment, Private Sector Incentives, and Nutrition

Feed Salone places strong emphasis on mobilising private sector investment alongside public action, particularly by encouraging import-dependent actors to invest in domestic production and processing through formal public-private partnerships, targeted mechanisation support, and measures that improve the commercial viability of local value chains. This approach aligns industrial and trade policy with food security objectives while creating conditions for more stable food supplies. Although increased domestic production does not automatically translate into improved dietary quality, strengthening local value chains can improve the availability, accessibility, and affordability of foods that form the basis of everyday diets - an important precondition for healthier eating patterns. One illustration of this approach is targeted support to local vegetable production, focusing on onions. In 2024, public and private investments supported a partnership between MAFS and the country's largest onion importer, facilitating its transition toward domestic production through mechanised farming involving more than 1,100 farmers, including women and youth.

These measures strengthened local value chains, generated employment, and contributed to a 10% reduction in onion imports within a single year (8). Government-led initiatives such as the [Smallholder Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Project](#) have also strengthened Sierra Leone's poultry value chain by expanding production capacity, introducing modern farming technologies, and improving sector coordination through tools such as a national poultry database.

Private investment has also been mobilised in agro-processing. The SABCO Sardine Factory transitioned from retail operations into domestic fish processing, using locally sourced inputs to supply the local market with nutrient-rich fish products while creating employment opportunities. Similarly, a modern cashew processing facility was commissioned near Freetown through a partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone, EU, and INGO Solidaridad. The facility processes over 800 kilograms of raw cashew nuts daily and employs more than 300 women and youth farmers, replacing hazardous traditional methods with safer and more efficient technologies while generating economic and social benefits for surrounding communities. These examples in specific value chains have also contributed to Feed Salone's strategic objective of creating economic opportunities for youth. The initiative's emphasis on transforming agriculture into a viable business has helped attract young people into the sector, through public and private programmes. Madam Nenebah Jalloh, National Coordinator for the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement in the Food Systems Coordination Unit in the Office of the Vice President, highlighted this shift:

***"Sierra Leone's Feed Salone Initiative has successfully increased youth engagement in agriculture by strategically investing in critical irrigation infrastructure. This effort aims to rebrand agriculture among the younger generation, shifting perceptions from traditional subsistence farming to a modern, profitable, and sustainable business opportunity."***

*Madam Nenebah Jalloh, SUN National Coordinator*

Across multiple value chains, public and private sector engagement has played a role in supporting youth employment, while making agriculture more inclusive and dynamic for young people. In support of the Initiatives' agenda, the Government of Sierra Leone is aligning its national nutrition plans through strategic initiatives led by MAFS. These efforts focus on improving the nutritional quality and safety of the national food supply to combat malnutrition and secure long-term health benefits for vulnerable populations, including children and rural communities. Key initiatives include a data-driven partnership with the IITA to develop a food consumption database (table), which will inform the country's first Food Consumption and Micronutrient Survey in 2025-2026. This shift from data collection to actionable insight is precisely what gives these initiatives their power, a point emphasized by Dr. Martha Williams, a researcher at Njala University in Freetown:

***"The creation of a comprehensive Food Consumption Table is fundamental to providing the evidence base required for informed policy development and strategic decision-making in the field of nutrition."***

*Dr. Martha Williams, Researcher, Njala University*

### **Perceptions of the Feed Salone at District level**

District-level consultations conducted for this case study indicate strong awareness of and support for the Feed Salone Initiative, which is widely recognised as a flagship government programme. At the same time, some stakeholders noted that tangible impacts are not yet widely felt at community level, reflecting both the initiative's relatively early stage of implementation and expectations that outcomes will become more visible over a longer time horizon. District officers reported improvements in household food self-sufficiency among communities engaged in Feed Salone activities. In Bo District, Ms. Kadija Koroma, a Local Government Officer, explained that ***"the Initiative has successfully enabled approximately 70% of participating community members to achieve substantial dietary self-sufficiency through consumption of their own agricultural production."***

In practice, this has included a diverse mix of staples and protein sources such as rice, cassava, plantain, sesame, poultry, fish, and small ruminants. The activities have also been accompanied by education on sustainable farming and healthy diets, with farmers encouraged to retain part of their harvest for household consumption rather than selling all produce, directly strengthening food security and nutritional well-being. An agribusiness enterprise representative, Ms. Frances Yatta Jusu, CEO of YAT-JAY in Kenema, was interviewed to gather the private sector perspective on the Feed Salone.

She highlighted its dual impact on both social cohesion and food security, and reported that ***“the Initiative has effectively channeled youth energy into constructive agricultural activities, including rice, cassava, and sweet potato production, serving as a positive alternative to detrimental behaviors.”*** She also noted that the programme has expanded home-based food production through backyard gardening, enhancing household food autonomy and reducing reliance on purchased foods. At the same time, district-level actors emphasized that Feed Salone remains at an early stage of implementation. Mr. Patrick Momoh, Executive Director of the Movement Towards Peace and Development Agency, a local NGO in Makeni District, noted that ***“though the Feed Salone is widely recognized, it is still in its early stages of implementation. As a result, most community members in the district have not yet experienced its tangible benefits.”*** This perspective underscores the time required for a national food systems initiative of this scale to translate into consistent, community-level outcomes.

- **Coordination mechanisms are essential.** Structures such as the Food Systems Coordination Unit, Inter-Ministerial Task Force, and DEPAC provide intentional spaces for dialogue, alignment, and accountability.
- **Domestic investment anchors external support.** Increased public financing, expanded staffing, and targeted incentives have strengthened Feed Salone’s credibility and encouraged aligned engagement from development partners and the private sector.
- **Narratives matter.** Framing food and nutrition security through a food systems lens can allow for greater sustained political commitment and public support.
- **Systemic change takes time.** Despite strong policy alignment and early progress, tangible community-level impacts emerge gradually, underscoring the need for sustained investment, implementation, and district-level delivery and ownership.

## Lessons Learned

Sierra Leone’s early experience with Feed Salone offers useful insights into how policy coherence and agenda linking can be pursued in practice, and the conditions needed to translate them into action. The initiative reflects a government-led agri-food systems approach with strong political backing. Early progress in expanding production, mobilising investment, and incorporating nutrition is encouraging, while impacts on household food security and nutrition are still emerging - underscoring that food systems transformation is a long-term process. Sustained progress will require continued political attention, advancing toward the 10% agriculture budget target, and accelerating delivery at community level through deployment of field staff and resources for smallholder farmers. Key lessons emerging from Feed Salone’s initial phase include:

- **Flagship initiatives can catalyze early alignment.** A high-level, politically owned initiative such as Feed Salone can bring together sectors and actors under a shared vision. Its anchoring in the national development plan and senior political leadership has been critical for reducing institutional silos.
- **Clear strategic pillars enable coordination.** Feed Salone’s six pillars translate broad objectives into concrete entry points for ministries and partners to align action.
- **Linking agriculture across sectors strengthens coherence.** Integration with the SFP demonstrates how agriculture, nutrition, education, and social protection can be aligned through public procurement and value-chain development.

## Conclusions

Sierra Leone’s experience illustrates how advancing nutrition through agri-food systems transformation can be pursued in practice. Under the national flagship programme Feed Salone, strong political leadership, a whole-of-government approach, and deliberate coordination have helped connect interventions across production, markets, and consumption. By applying an agri-food systems lens spanning productivity, markets, finance, economic inclusion, and consumption, the initiative has brought agriculture, nutrition, education, climate action, private sector engagement, and social protection into closer coherence. Together, these elements create pathways to strengthen food security while enabling healthier diets. Feed Salone has drawn on existing national policy structures while reinforcing their implementation by providing a unifying platform for coordination and prioritisation across sectors, and by creating space for policy adaptation as the initiative evolves. Within this framework, nutrition considerations have been integrated through linkages with school feeding, support for more diverse food production, attention to food safety, and investments in food consumption data. Alignment with climate resilience and human capital development reflects the interconnected nature of food systems challenges. While implementation is ongoing and community-level impacts will continue to evolve, Feed Salone demonstrates how multisectoral collaboration, sustained public investment, and evidence-informed planning can lay foundations for more resilient, inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive food systems.



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