



Nigeria Has To Act Fast To Develop Sustainable Food Systems – VP Osinbajo



His Excellency Vice President Yemi Osinbajo (inset) addressing both the online and virtual participants at the Nigeria Food Systems Summit Dialogue.

The Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo has emphasized the need for Nigeria to act fast in developing sustainable food systems as it faces a population growth that is ahead of its economic growth figures.

“There are questions around ensuring environmentally sustainable production practices, creating empowering jobs and livelihoods, and building capacities to ensure sustainable and healthy food systems,” the Vice President explained and urged that “the food we produce and eat, how we produce and eat, should be environmentally friendly and not destroy the environment for future generations.

Prof. Osinbajo made these remarks during the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) inception dialogue, organised by the Nigerian government in collaboration with the United Nations, which was held virtually with over 700 participants in attendance.

The Vice President said the need to create a food system that works “has never been more urgent and more existential” as the country’s poverty levels has worsened particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout.

In her remarks, the minister for Finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, said the Nigerian government has shown a clear commitment to the eradication of malnutrition in recent years through the adoption and domestication of policies and significant strategic plans, which emphasise increased reliance on domestic funding.

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr Edward Kallon, thanked the government of Nigeria for the importance attached to the food systems summit demonstrated by appointing the Permanent Secretary of Budget and National planning as the National Convenor. “I commend the strong commitment and excellent leadership provided in driving the food systems summit dialogue in this country.” He said in a state-

ment delivered on his behalf by the Country Representative of Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Mr Fred Kafeewo.

The National Convenor of the Nigeria Food Systems Summit dialogue, Mrs Olusola Idowu, said Nigeria is committed to ensuring participatory and inclusive dialogues that would engender resilient and equitable food systems in Nigeria.

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FG, UN To Ensure Substantial And Positive Changes In Nigeria's Food Systems



The Government of Nigeria and the United Nations system have reiterated their commitment to ensuring substantial and positive changes in Nigeria's food systems.

"Nigeria is working with the UN and other stakeholders to ensure that the nation's food systems are more sustainable, inclusive and resilient," said the National Convenor of Nigeria Food Systems Summit Dialogues, and Permanent Secretary, Budget and National Planning, Mrs Olusola Idowu, at a webinar for journalists, held on Monday, 9 February 2021.

To achieve this, Mrs. Idowu explained, National Food Summit Dialogues would be organized across Nigeria and there would be a harvest of contributions towards shaping the pathways that will lead to collective determination of sustainable food systems and how they will contribute to achieving food security in Nigeria.

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Edward Kallon, emphasized the importance of sustainability of the food system. "We need to put in place systems to ensure that we produce enough food for the current generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to have access to adequate food and proper nutrition." He said, "As the population continues to grow, and with the many players in the food industry, there is greater need for all of us to understand how we will ensure availability of quality food in quantities that will cater for the needs of all people in a sustainable way."

Mr. Kallon underscored the importance of the media in ensuring sustainable food systems. "Without the media, all dialogues would be likened to 'winking in the dark', no one sees what you are doing. Nigeria is blessed with a vibrant press in a pluralistic media ecosystem and populated by professionals who constitute one of the world's best." He explained and urged media partners to get in the flow of the UN Food Systems Summit, and to support "our efforts by encouraging debate and discussion among the population on issues of sustainable food systems for the country.

"While we must understand the purpose of current food systems, their functions and our own vision in the next decade. We need to also know the changes that need to be made for food systems to meet the SDGs expectations by 2030 and how stakeholders need to effectively work together or differently for collec-

tive action," said the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Country Representative, Mr Fred Kafeero.

Speaking on the UN Food Systems Dialogue and ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all, Peter Hawkins, UNICEF Representative in Nigeria, underscoring the importance of safe and nutritious food, said: "One out of every 3 children in Nigeria is stunted; 1 in 10 children is wasted. This is not only a personal tragedy for families but also has a direct impact on human resources. Unfortunately, Nigeria's food system has failed children, young people and adults in delivering safe, nutritious food."

WHO Representative, Dr Walter Kazadi Mulombo noted, "Nigeria already has a good number of policies and regulations, but what we need now is implementation. There is a need to generate game changing solutions that can catalyze shift in consumption through changes in food policy, food environments, private sector and offering and consumers behavior."

"Around the world, more than enough food is produced to feed the global population—but over 690 million people still remain hungry" said, Mr. Mohamed Yahya UNDP Resident Representative for Nigeria. He observed that successfully tackling these challenges required a major shift from our current consumption patterns to sustainable nature-positive production at scale. "This has become a necessity, as our food system is currently limiting our ability to achieve the SDGs". He added.

The Representative of IFAD in Nigeria, Ms Nadine Gbosa, called for inclusion of pro-poor nature-based solutions and climate change and environment policies to improve the capacity of the poor to manage risks. "Effort must be focused on making value chains inclusive through the generation of decent employment and improving resilience through social protection." Said Ms Nadine who was represented by Ms Florence Iseko.

Speaking on "Building Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses", Representative and Country Director, WFP Nigeria, Dr. Paul Howe, noted that "We need to explore solutions to ensure that if there's a shock, vulnerability or stresses, food systems maintain their functionality and keep going. Or, if there's a disruption, it's able to recover quickly."

In September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres will convene a Food Systems Summit as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

“I am the UN boy!”

Azaiya, 6, is a Cameroonian refugee whose eyesight had deteriorated so much that he had to be carried to safety in Nigeria by his step-sister. Thanks to a UNHCR sponsored eye surgery, he can now go to school like any other child.



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Azaiya

After living with impaired vision for much of his six years, Azaiya recalls the exact moment the world swam back into view.

“The first thing I saw was the shining white hospital dress I was wearing,” he recalls.

The Cameroonian boy’s face lights up with a dazzling smile as he greets the visitors who have come to check on him at his home at Ikyogen refugee settlement in south-east Nigeria.

“I am happy I can see,” says Azaiya, adding, “And that I can go to school.”

His outlook has not always been so bright. When he fled Cameroon three years ago, he could hardly distinguish light from darkness. Living with cataracts that left him visually impaired, his stepsister, 39-year-old Onal, had to carry him through the forests to safety.

At the settlement that UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency built to receive families fleeing the conflict between secessionist forces in north-west and south-west Cameroon and the military, Azaiya could not make a step on his own.

Uneven footpaths, open channels in the rainy season, fireplaces and poles between shelters all posed additional risks for him. Trips to the latrine required someone to take him by his hand and going to school was a distant dream.

But help came when UNHCR staff discovered his difficulties and referred him to eye specialists. The medics promptly diagnosed congenital cataracts.

“Left unattended, it worsened over time as his vision progressively deteriorated,” explains Ernest Ochang, UNHCR’s Assistant Public Health Officer based in the city of Ogoja.

Azaiya needed eye surgery, so UNHCR and its health partner FHI 360 made the critical intervention possible in June 2020.

Forced displacement is particularly tough for people with disabilities like Azaiya, as they are often at higher risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. They can face barriers in accessing basic services, are often excluded from education and can face discrimination when looking for work.

When Azaiya later returned to the settlement, equipped with a pair of glasses, his world opened up. While his vision is still classed as ‘low,’ he does not have to depend on others to move about. More importantly, he can go to school unimpeded.

Taking a seat in the first row of desks, Azaiya has begun to read and write. While his eyes seem to falter at times, his progress is visible to staff.

“He is trying to read from the blackboard and is making little progress, but progress all the same,” explains Akule Lucy Angbian-doo, his teacher at the local primary school.

In the school playground, he plays just like any other student. The improvements in Azaiya’s life have also helped his stepsister Onal, who became the family’s main breadwinner after her brother died in the conflict across the border in Cameroon.

She farms cassava, rice and corn. But as Azaiya needs less hand-holding, she also has time to pursue her former trade as a tailor. UNHCR supported her to take a fashion design course, and thanks to some financial support from Save the Children, where she worked as a volunteer, she now has a new sewing machine. She makes clothes for children in her shelter and hopes to open a shop in the settlement’s main square.

About 100 people live with a disability in Ikyogen settlement. UNHCR seeks to help them by ensuring they are included in decision making processes and have access to psychosocial support, if needed.

Onal still has moments of sadness when she mourns her brother. But when Azaiya comes to her shelter, her spirits get a lift. Soon, boys and girls from the other shelters surround him – they all want to hear his story again and again.

He enjoys the attention and looks at his friends with a grin. Inspired by the surgeon who changed his life, he wants to become one too and work in a hospital one day.

“Call me Dr. Asuquo!” he says, referring to the name of the doctor who led his surgery.

Everyone bursts out in laughter, awed by the precocious boy’s nature, and his dazzling smile.

Working With COVID-19 Survivors To Battle The Pandemic



Left: COVID-19 survivor supporting sensitization activities in Lagos.

Right: Some female COVID-19 survivors pledging to create awareness about the pandemic in Lagos

For Ade Ogunsanya, a resident of Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos, a lapse in following the recommended COVID-19 preventive measures proved costly. Fortunately, he is a survivor who lived to tell his story.

Being asthmatic, Ade knew he had to be extra careful and adhere to necessary precautions such as properly wearing his mask in public places, sanitizing his hands regularly and maintaining social distancing. For a while he was too cautious that his friends made fun of him.

But he admits that whenever he hung out with his friends, he would throw caution to the wind, removing his mask to chat. In October 2020 he started to feel tired and experienced severe symptoms that appeared to be associated with the life-threatening disease, malaria.

"It was after I went to the hospital and got tested that I realized that I had caught the COVID-19 virus and that I had spread it to a loved one. I had to stay home for over a month, testing and re-testing several times before being confirmed free of the coronavirus," Ade said.

Ade was among 48 COVID-19 survivors who were celebrated recently by the Lagos State Ministry of Health, with support from World Health Organization (WHO). The survivors recently gathered to give testimonies and learn how to become ambassadors advocating on living through COVID-19. The survivors are among 48 000 recovered patients in the state's COVID-19 hotspots in Eti Osa and Alimosho Local Government Areas (LGA).

"Covid is real," Ade declared when he spoke at the event. "I've lost loved ones, families and colleagues, so I count myself as one of the lucky ones."

Dubbed the COVID-19 Heroes and Heroines campaign, the gatherings, where physical distancing was observed, helped survivors bond and share their experiences, including the mental and physical effort it took them to overcome the illness.

The Heroes and Heroines campaign is part of Lagos State's drive to ramp up sensitization on COVID-19 for its 21 million population amid a second wave of the pandemic.

While some complied with distancing and masking guidelines at the beginning of the pandemic, there is less adherence to preventive measures. Nigeria is now seeing a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases.

Raising awareness of COVID-19 prevention is particularly important in Lagos, Nigeria's biggest city and commercial capital.

Lagos is the epicenter of the country's outbreak, with more than 50 000 cases recorded by mid-February 2021.

To reduce the burden on frontline health workers at isolation centers, the state introduced home-based care in June 2020 as an alternative. Yet, with the rate of spread, attitude change will prove useful in helping people stay safe and reducing the burden on health facilities, experts say.

There is large scale disbelief at the existence of COVID-19 so the testimony of survivors goes a long way towards addressing this and influencing behaviours," says Dr Tolulope Folarin, a WHO risk communications expert. "When those who have survived Covid-19 share some of the realities of living with it, that goes a long way in influencing those around them to be cautious."

Lagos state and WHO are mobilizing survivors to reach out to communities and reinforce observance of preventive measures. Survivors are also urged to be ambassadors of hope to those battling the virus.

"Some people stopped coming to me, but I was never afraid of discussing what happened to me," said Nancy Smith, a 73-year-old survivor living in Alimosho. She suffered severe lung distress for up to a month. "I like to talk about it so that people understand what it is like to contract COVID-19. Some people will shun you because you have COVID-19. God saved my life so I will be able to testify that it is not a death sentence."

Speaking on ways survivors can spread the word about COVID-19 prevention, WHO Risk Communications Officer Dr Akinola Adeola said, "We've heard many people asking 'Do you know anyone that has it?' So we are saying speak about your experiences. Spreading the news on what it feels like to deal with COVID-19 will help dispel myths and rumors about the disease," he added.

COVID-19 response lead for Alimosho LGA, Dr Odufuwa Kayode Adekunle, said Lagos State and WHO continue to ensure COVID-19 patients and their contacts are monitored.

Warning on leaving people unaware of Covid19 Dr Rosemary Onyibe, WHO South-West Zonal Coordinator warned that this could be devastating to the country. She said, "Let us save our people from being sick, let us save our economy from being shut down and help the government save on spending."

For Ade, the shining light is that he survived because the state's health officers never stopped calling till he was completely clear of the disease. Thanks to the efforts of the government of Nigeria and WHO.

NiMet Predicts ‘Near to Above-Normal’ Rainfall in 2021, Launches Mobile Weather App



L-R: WMO Representative for North, West and Central Africa Bernard Gomez, Honourable Minister of Aviation Senator Hadi Sirika, and DG/CEO of NiMet Prof. Sani Mashai

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) has released the 2021 Seasonal Climate Prediction (SCP) to provide information on expected climate pattern in relation to the various sectors of the country. The Seasonal Climate Prediction was launched at an event organized by NiMet which held on February 2 in Abuja. The event was streamed live on YouTube.

The Director General of NiMet and Permanent Representative of Nigeria with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Professor Sani Abubakar Mashai stated in his opening remarks that the release of the Seasonal Climate Prediction with the theme “supporting the economy to cope with the challenges of COVID-19 global pandemic in Nigeria,” was in fulfilment of the Agency’s mandate to provide timely, accurate weather and climate forecasts as well as advisories to Nigerians against possible adverse and extreme weather and climate events that may affect various sectors of the economy.

The Honourable Minister of Aviation Senator Hadi Sirika provided a summary of the Seasonal Climate Prediction. According to the Minister, a normal to above-normal annual rainfall amount is expected for most parts of the country. Noting that below-normal rainfall totals are envisaged in a few parts of North-western Nigeria. The rainfall onset for 2021 which signifies the growing season is predicted to be normal to earlier than normal.

The earliest onset date set at 1 March 2021 along the coastal areas, and the latest date is likely to be 29th June in the northern parts of the country. The cessation dates are predicted to be relatively normal and would possibly occur around 9th October 2021 in the northern parts and 25th December 2021 in the coastal areas. The growing season is expected to have a range of

between 110 to 300 days in the extreme north and south respectively.

The Honourable Minister described NiMet as one of the best meteorological agencies in Africa owing to its continuous strive for excellence in meeting national, regional and global expectations in weather and climate service delivery to mitigate the increasing trend of uncertainties regarding weather and the changing climate.

The event was attended by State Governors, several Ministers, Parliamentarians, other top government dignitaries, the academia, traditional rulers as well as farmers and students. The Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization, Professor Petteri Taalas joined virtually and presented a goodwill message. In his goodwill message, Prof. Taalas thanked the Federal Government of Nigeria for its support to NiMet and congratulated NiMet for the release of the 2021 SCP.

He spoke briefly about the importance of climate reports and some WMO interventions planned for developing countries. The WMO S-G recognized the contributions of NiMet to the WMO community and called on NiMet to extend more technical support to weaker meteorological agencies in the region.

“NiMet also released the 2020 State of the Climate in Nigeria report and launched a Mobile Weather App at the event. NiMet and other national meteorological services contribute surface and upper air weather observation data to the WMO Information System which is used to produce data products by various global data centers. These WMO affiliated data products support weather forecasting in Nigeria and elsewhere, and the development of the Seasonal Climate Prediction in Nigeria on an annual basis.”

Wildlife Trafficking Through Nigerian Ports Continues Despite COVID-19

On 20 January 2021 officers of the Nigeria Customs Service at the Apapa Port Command seized a container bound for Vietnam with an unusual mix of illegal wildlife products.

The 20 feet container was found to contain the remains of various endangered species, including 2,772 pieces of elephant tusks of different shapes weighing about 4,752kg, 162 sacks of pangolin scales weighing 5,329kg, 5kg of rhino horns, dried and fresh animal bones, 103 kg of skulls suspected to be of lions and other wild cat and 76 pieces of timber (semi-processed and processed).

According to the World Customs Organization (WCO) accredited technical and operational advisor on illegal wildlife trade and officer of Nigeria Customs, Animashawun Abimbola, this achievement was a result of risk profiling. The knowledge was obtained from parameters of previous interceptions both inside and beyond Nigeria, as well as the findings of recent technical reports, such as the 2020 UNODC World Wildlife Crime Report, which states that all export containers from Nigeria destined to Asia can be considered high risk. This understanding, as well as the recent capacity building on intelligence and risk profiling for officers of Nigeria customs provided by the WCO, have resulted in routine targeting of export containers based on risk profiling.

This most recent seizure provides another reminder that in the span of only a few years Nigeria has turned into a major transit hub for wildlife products leaving the continent and destined for the markets in Asia, Europe, and North America. It is also the first seizure since outbreak of COVID-19, confirming that the illegal trade in wildlife and forest products continues despite lockdowns, travel restrictions and reduced trade flows.

To remedy this situation, UNODC is supporting the Government of Nigeria through two initiatives, supported by Germany and the European Union.



Nigerian Customs Seizures at the Apapa Port, Lagos

In 2020, UNODC with the financial support of Germany launched a project in cooperation with the Nigerian Government aimed at strengthening Nigeria's response to the trafficking of wildlife and forest products. This will be achieved through the development of Nigeria's first national strategy to combat wildlife crime, trainings for frontline officers to detect and intercept illegal shipments of wildlife, as well as strengthening of prosecutorial and judicial capacity to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate wildlife and forest crime. This project is being implemented in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Environment, the Nigeria Customs Service, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), as well as other state and non-state actors.

Additionally, as part of the support of the European Union to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), UNODC will undertake a comprehensive assessment of Nigeria's preventive and criminal justice response to wildlife and forest crime, using the ICWC Analytical Toolkit and ICWC Indicator Framework, and support the conduct a corruption risk assessment of the wildlife sector in Nigeria.

EU Funded Project Records Successes in School-Based Drug Prevention

John started using tramadol to handle his grief and anxieties after losing his parents in a car accident. His use became quickly so excessive that he was no longer able to attend school eventually dropping out altogether at the age of sixteen. Unfortunately, John's story is emblematic for an ever-increasing number of young Nigerians.

According to the [Nigeria Drug Use Survey of 2018](#) there are over 14.4% of the population between 15-64 years who have used either an illicit drug consumed a pharmaceutical drug for non-medical purposes during the preceding 12 months. Thus, drug use prevalence in Nigeria is among the highest globally.

Drug use was found to be most common among 25 and 39 years old. However, more recently collected data suggests that first-time drug users may be on average becoming younger. The Nigerian Epidemiology Network on Drug Use NENDU 5-Year Report (NENDU) examined the demand for treatment in 25 treatment centres in Nigeria from 2015 – 2019. Results showed that 29.7% of the admissions were for people between the ages of 15-24 years.

These numbers called for an urgent intervention aimed to curb the further spread of the drug use epidemic, in particular among young people, through evidence-based prevention programmes. In 2015, UNODC in partnership with the Nigerian Ministry of Education and with the support of the European Union, therefore, commenced the roll-out of the [Unplugged Drug Prevention Programme in Nigeria](#). Unplugged is an evidence-based school drug prevention pro-

gram comprising of 12 lessons to build life skills in young people making them more resilient to the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. The aim of the programme was to curb initiation of drug use and delay the transition from experimental to addicted behaviour involving alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other drugs.

In the first round, the project delivered training to 410 teachers from 104 secondary schools. In the meanwhile, many teachers trained in the delivery of UNPLUGGED have received refresher courses, and a core group of eight master trainers has been certified who continue to train and mentor teachers in the delivery of UNPLUGGED. Nigerian master trainers have also delivered the UNPLUGGED training to teachers in Liberia.

The implementation of the programme was closely monitored and evaluated to assess its impact. Each phase of the initial pilot testing of the programme was followed by a physical visit to the school and interviews with teachers implementing the programme as well as focus group discussions with the students. Results have been encouraging.

In a study carried out by UNODC and the Ministry of Education to evaluate the implementation of the programme, 90% of students indicated that UNPLUGGED had helped to improve their decision making and choices, with many students stating that their ability to manage and resist peer pressure in particular when it came to drug use had improved. For 82%, it improved the vision of themselves and for 80% the relationship with their school mates. As a result of the programme, schools also became aware of specific incidents of drug use in the school and to address those more effectively.

PHOTO NEWS



Captions, from left to right in a clockwise direction

1. *UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (5th from left) and UN Resident Coordinator, Edward Kallon (first from the right) at the launch of the Gombe State 10 –Year Development Plan*
2. *Resident Representative of UNDP in Nigeria, Mr Mohamed Yahya (foreground) with Doctors, Nurses and Care-givers at the UN Isolation and Treatment Centre*
3. *Country Representative of UNICEF Nigeria, Peter Hawkins discusses with the Ondo State Governor - H.E Rotimi Akeredolu, on ways to improve the state's primary healthcare system*

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