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Creating a more robust, inclusive, and sustainable food system for population health in Vanuatu

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Abstract

Background Ensuring adequate nutrition and food security is increasingly recognised as a priority concern for population health in Vanuatu. With the transition to diets high in imported foods, Vanuatu faces the triple burden of malnutrition – overnutrition, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies – and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. Increasing availability of, and access to, nutritious fresh food is therefore an imperative for improving population health into the future. This requires a food system – from farm to table – that is more robust, inclusive, and sustainable. There are many barriers to such a food system, however, including natural disasters and the impacts of climate change; and the impact of factors such as pandemics and geopolitical events on supply chains; and trade and tax policy impacts on food quality and supply, to name a few.

Methods: Recognising the imperative for multi-sectoral, multi-scalar action to support food system change, key actors from government and UN agencies in health and agriculture collaborated to run a series of national dialogues, as part of the global United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021. This paper presents the outcomes of focus group discussions undertaken with over 60 private, non-government and community services sectors stakeholders to identify key areas for action.

Results: The three key areas identified by the participants were: ● Leadership and Governance ● Improved Diets and Food Environment. ● Resilient Food Systems and Livelihoods.

Discussion: Ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food for all Ni-Vanuatu requires multi-sector, multi-scalar actions. Leadership and governance were identified as the foundation for food system change. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities for multi-sectoral food system governance in Vanuatu and considers the implications for improved population health.