

SCIENTIFIC DIALOGUE I

Sustainable Agriculture & Economy

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Sri Lanka's economic crisis has brought to the forefront of Agriculture serious concerns, especially relating to increases in Agricultural inputs, food prices and shortages in food. As a result, uncertainties have grown about whether, in the coming months, (a) required food supplies will be available, (b) the Agri-Food sector will be able to sustain the livelihoods of those engaged in crop, livestock and poultry farming, fishing, food manufacturing, food distribution and allied activities and (c) the Agri-Food sector will be able to provide food security for those most affected by the crisis. Within this context, the members of the Faculties of Agriculture of the State Universities of Sri Lanka, recognize that following concerns are of particular significance to the most vulnerable communities, the country needs to immediately develop and implement a plan of action to address several key areas to sustain agriculture in-order to improve food security of the island nation –

1. Provide the basic food needs of the population through direct administrative/regulatory interventions, including but not limited to rationing of scarce supplies to the most vulnerable across the country.
2. Ensure the availability of raw materials/inputs at affordable prices to sustain those engaged in the Agri-Food sector, prioritizing the farming of crops, livestock, poultry, and fisheries. These sub-sectors of the Agricultural economy can

- most effectively and efficiently provide consumption requirements and attract foreign exchange to the country.
3. Develop a new generation of food growers, new sources of food and sustainable sources of Agri-Inputs, such as plant nutrients, plant protection options, planting materials, feed, mechanical tools/implements, and farm power, where applicable.
 4. Develop effective and efficient institutional support for research and development, extension, and input supply, which addresses the country's needs based on scientific evidence, and which integrates traditional extension systems with mass media, digital technology, and community-based organizational structures.
 5. Sustain key stakeholders in the existing supply and distribution channels, and introduce new and innovative channels, strengthen local markets, and address vulnerable populations using existing institutional and local level structures. Strengthen and deploy technologies, regulations, and institutions to reduce postharvest losses, improve storage and processing methods at the local level, and support innovations across the value chain.
 6. Create a conducive environment to find alternative sources of locally available food and agri-inputs, where possible, to support food production.

Problems confronted by the Sri Lankan society today are a result of a lack of a consistent long-term policy and action programs for agriculture, which could have prevented a crisis of this nature from occurring. Such a policy must be developed and must include mechanisms to address future crisis situations by effectively using knowledge, other resources, and institutional structures (state and others), using consultative processes in a holistic manner. It must also ensure that a system to address pressing issues, over the long term, in a sustained manner, is developed. The **'Strategy for Restoration and Rebuilding the Agri-Food Sector'** is a concerted effort by the Government of Sri Lanka and it should pursue to restore and rebuild

its Agri-Food sector, using scarce but available resources. The document submitted by the members of the Faculties of Agriculture of the State Universities of Sri Lanka addresses the entire food system, considering all economic actors and priority sub-sectors in the agriculture value/supply chains and identifies short and medium needs and interventions, also considering long term requirements., it is noted, have already been discussed and implemented, suggesting that the government is taking these concerns seriously and is attempting to address them to some extent.

The Ministry of Education should facilitate students and teachers to attend schools in their neighborhood till there is improvement in the economic situation. Schools should initiate activities that can provide joy and relaxation to children instead of focusing too much on the traditional curriculum. They should also function as social spaces where students, parents and teachers can get together and chart mechanisms of survival and resilience. Students could take the lead in cultivating vegetables in their **School Gardens (Kitchen Gardens)**. **School kitchens**, established with the help of the wider community, may ensure that future generations get the necessary nutrients for their growth. Apart from the above suggestions for a national agricultural policy, Sri Lanka's vulnerability to the effects of climate change will continue to threaten food security and nutrition. Therefore, these precautionary measures and prioritized strategies should be undertaken for Sri Lanka to overcome the grappling issues and emerge as a stronger nation.
