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# COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

## Twenty-fifth Session

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## The Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

### Executive Summary

Since the GIAHS Initiative was launched in 2002, it has been piloting an innovative model that engages communities, local and national governments to identify, recognize, support and safeguard Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems and their livelihoods, agricultural and associated biodiversity, landscapes, knowledge systems and cultures around the world.

In order to enhance further GIAHS and promote conservation of traditional agricultural systems, the GIAHS Initiative was endorsed as an FAO corporate programme at the 39<sup>th</sup> FAO Conference in June 2015.

Accordingly, the GIAHS Programme has been embedded into FAO's Strategic Framework, in particular Strategic Objective 2, with a more streamlined decision making processes and governance structure and the Secretariat has been made fully operational. A new Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) has been established in 2016 for a two-year period ensuring independent scientific advice and guidance to the GIAHS programme operations and development.

Building on experiences and lessons learned over the past 14 years, the GIAHS Programme can become an effective instrument in support to countries, through FAO's Strategic Objective 2, assisting them in broadening existing and adopting new policies that integrate agricultural heritage into their development plans.

### Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) take note of the information presented in the document and provide its guidance as deemed appropriate, on further alignment of GIAHS programme and activities with FAO's Programme, through country and regional level delivery mechanisms.

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For more information on GIAHS see <http://www.fao.org/giahs>

## I. Introduction

1. Worldwide, specific agricultural systems and landscapes have been created, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders based on diverse natural resources, using locally adapted management practices. Building on local knowledge and experience, these agricultural systems reflect the evolution of humankind, the diversity of its knowledge, and its relationship with nature. These systems have resulted not only in maintenance and adaptation of globally significant agricultural biodiversity, indigenous knowledge systems and resilient ecosystems, but, above all, in the sustained provision of multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security for millions of poor and family farmers.

2. In order to safeguard and support the world's agricultural heritage systems, in 2002 FAO started an initiative for the conservation of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). The GIAHS Initiative promotes public understanding, awareness, national and international recognition of Agricultural Heritage systems. Looking to safeguard the social, cultural, economic and environmental goods and services these provide to family farmers, smallholders, indigenous peoples and local communities, the initiative fosters an integrated approach combining sustainable agriculture and rural development.

3. These individuals have, over time, learned to manage their environments to produce sufficient quality food to sustain their lives while conserving the natural resource base and natural ecological processes. Agricultural heritage systems pertain to a wealth of diverse biological resources, knowledge systems and management techniques that have the common goal of ensuring food security and quality of life for humanity. These agricultural heritage systems provide mechanisms with which to cope with the challenges of today and tomorrow such as climate variability and demographic changes.

## II. Overview of GIAHS achievements since 2002

4. Since the GIAHS Initiative was launched in 2002, it has been developing and piloting an innovative model that engages communities, local and national governments to identify, recognize, support and safeguard Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems and their livelihoods, agricultural and associated biodiversity, landscapes, knowledge systems and cultures.

5. The programme has produced considerable experiences and lessons learned as follows:

- a) The recognition of GIAHS as an important social incentive that impacts farmers and consumers – recognizes the important and positive role of family farming communities and their knowledge and practices related to the conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity for present and future generations.
- b) The identification of and support to resilient rural livelihood systems, traditionally-based family-scale agrosystems and their associated high-value ecosystems services through reconstructing traditional knowledge and skills and the identification of elements suited to strengthening best practices, thereby rendering them transferable.
- c) The recognition that family farmers, ethnic minorities and local communities and their agricultural heritage values have generated diversified sources of livelihoods and incomes through the transformation of conservation activities into marketable incomes both on and off farm. For example: marketing and branding heritage products and services, establishing links to agri-tourism including the promotion of "rich cultural diversity".
- d) Climate-smart, locally-based agricultural systems incorporate all the strong elements required for adaptation and mitigation of climate change that link to agro-ecosystems, cultural diversity, the conservation of biodiversity and the empowerment of indigenous communities and women. The agricultural, heritage-sensitive, economic diversification that often lies at the heart of sustainable Agricultural Heritage Systems offer potential for strengthening the economic productivity of small-scale and family farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities.

6. Building on the support received from the membership of the organization, positive results and impacts, experiences and lessons learned of the past 14 years, the GIAHS Programme has become a meaningful instrument to assist member countries in broadening existing and adopting new policies that integrate agricultural heritage into their development plans.

7. In addition, the GIAHS concept is relevant to a number of existing multilateral instruments, including the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention. GIAHS supports activities undertaken within International Years, such as Family Farming in 2014, a basis for countries to join together in identifying the special needs of their family farmers and to develop ways and means to resolve ongoing challenges to rural peoples.

8. GIAHS concept is particularly applicable to food systems of indigenous and tribal peoples who retain connection to ancestral cultures and patterns of living in local ecosystems guided by strong conservation values while enhancing the benefits derived by indigenous peoples from the management, conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity and natural resources.

9. Since its inception, the GIAHS programme has gained considerable recognition both at the international and national levels. At the global level, GIAHS has been very much appreciated at various intergovernmental fora<sup>1</sup>. At the national level, GIAHS has been instrumental in the adoption of policies that integrate agricultural heritage into agricultural development programmes. It has also served as a learning tool for the identification of new ways to sustain natural resources and the health of ecosystems and conservation. It has also been influential in promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture, the protection of traditional knowledge systems, culture and, more importantly, creating a bridge to a sustainable future. In so doing, the GIAHS programme has contributed to achievement of FAO's Strategic Objective 2 (SO2), by promoting agricultural policies that address the multiple dimensions of development: productivity, conservation, as well as the social and cultural dimensions of agriculture.

10. Since 2015, the GIAHS Programme has stepped up capacity building and awareness raising activities. A number of events have contributed to these efforts, including the four GIAHS International Forums in Italy, Argentina, China and Japan; the second High-Level GIAHS Training was held in September 2015 in China and the third one is scheduled for October 2016. The GIAHS Workshop for Latin America and Caribbean region was held in April 2016. The GIAHS Workshop for West Africa was also organized jointly with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in June 2016.

11. As of 2016, there are 36 designated GIAHS sites in 15 countries<sup>2</sup> which reflect a wide variety of agricultural landscapes in different parts of the world and reveal human wisdom to domesticate nature and overcome difficulties in a sustainable way through the careful transfer of knowledge accumulated across generations.

### **III. Inclusion of GIAHS within FAO Programme**

12. With increased recognition and visibility of the GIAHS in many countries and international fora, the 148<sup>th</sup> session of the FAO Council agreed that the GIAHS should be vested with formal status within the FAO framework and endorsed the initiation of a process for the development of a draft

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<sup>1</sup> The Third Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministerial Meeting Declaration on Food Security in September 2014 supported FAO's work on GIAHS and mentioned its relevance to rural development. G-20 Agriculture Minister Meeting in June 2016 also welcomed GIAHS in the context of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in food and agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/giahs/giahs-sites/en/>

Conference Resolution for anchoring GIAHS within the work of the Organization. This initiative was discussed in several governing bodies including the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the COAG in 2014 and led to the decision by the 39<sup>th</sup> FAO Conference in 2015 that vested the GIAHS programme into the FAO Strategic Framework.

13. This decision has enabled the smooth implementation of the functions of the GIAHS Secretariat, including oversight, management, coordination and implementation of the concept and its activities, with the understanding that the work on GIAHS will primarily rely on extra-budgetary funding. The GIAHS Secretariat has been staffed since July 2015 and operations have stepped up to increase awareness, implementation and capacity building activities on the GIAHS programme.

#### **IV. Alignment within FAO Strategic Framework**

14. Based on the decisions of the 39<sup>th</sup> FAO Conference, the GIAHS Programme has been also conceptually embedded into FAO's Strategic Framework. Under the scope of FAO Strategic Objective 2 (SO2), GIAHS primarily contributes to increased and improved provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner. The initiative contributes directly to Outcomes 2.1 of SO2, in particular Output 2.1.1 on innovative practices, including traditional practices that improve sustainability; and Outcome 2.2, as it refers to the promotion of integrated and multi-sectoral policy dialogues and approaches.

15. As a programme, GIAHS maintains scientific focus in full alignment with FAO's Strategic Framework, with a streamlined decision making processes and governance structure and a fully operational Secretariat. A new Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) composed of seven recognized independent members from different regions (see Annex 1) has been established in 2016 for a two-year period ensuring independent scientific advice and guidance to the GIAHS program operation and development. The Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) convened its inaugural meeting in February 2016 to discuss draft guidelines of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) as well as the draft Working Arrangement for the Scientific Advisory Group.

#### **V. Perspectives and suggested action by the Committee**

16. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will shape development policies in food and agriculture for the next 15 years to come. Implementing sustainable agriculture will therefore be central to the achievement of many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. New approaches are required, that address the multiple development goals and issues in a more integrated and interconnected way. FAO's recent efforts in that sense include the development of a *Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture*, a framework and an approach based on a set of sustainability principles to address development in agriculture in a more effective and integrated way.

17. The GIAHS Programme, with its integrated approach, and explicit recognition of multiple issues and roles associated with agriculture, has the potential to provide a relevant contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as part of FAO's overall support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Through its firm integration within the FAO Strategic Framework, it is expected that GIAHS activities will be more strategic and achieve higher impact at all levels.

18. The main objective for the immediate future remains the geographic expansion, as well as the development of a long term policy and strategic approach based on lessons learned, global challenges and perspectives and experiences from other existing concepts.

19. Key to the success of GIAHS will be better alignment with FAO work at regional and country levels, through the existing Delivery Mechanisms: Regional Initiatives and Country Programming Frameworks.

20. The COAG's role is to provide overall policy and strategic direction, based on periodically updates by the Secretariat on the status of implementation of the programme.

21. In this regard, the Committee is requested to take note of the information presented in the document and provide its guidance as deemed appropriate, on further alignment of GIAHS programme and activities with FAO's Programme, through country and regional level delivery mechanisms.

**Annex 1 - Members of the GIAHS Scientific Advisory Group**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title and Institute/Office/University/Ministry</b>
Europe	Italy	Mr Mauro Agnoletti	Associate Professor of University of Firenze
Latin America and Caribbean	Brazil	Ms Patricia Goulart Bustamante	Researcher of EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation)
North America	Canada	Ms Anne McDonald	Professor in Sophia University Graduate School of Environmental Studies (Japan)
Asia/Pacific	China	Mr Qingwen Min	Professor of Center for Natural and Cultural Heritage Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS
Africa	Kenya	Ms Helida Oyieke	Chief Research Scientist at National Museums of Kenya
Asia/Pacific	Japan	Mr Kazuhiko Takeuchi	Senior Vice-Rector of United Nations University (Tokyo)
Near East	Tunisia	Mr Slim Zekri	Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Natural Resource Economics, College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University