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Outcomes of the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa

Executive Summary

Within the growing challenges of enhancing sustainable food production when faced with environmental degradation, agroecology can provide a positive contribution to the eradication of hunger and extreme poverty, and a means to facilitate the transition to more productive, sustainable and inclusive food systems.

Seeking to gain better understanding of the role that agroecology can play in achieving an end to hunger and malnutrition, FAO organized the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition¹ in September 2014 in Rome, Italy. The Symposium brought together 400 scientists, policy makers, farmers' organizations, the private sector and NGO representatives.

Following the recommendations of the International Agroecology Symposium, three regional meetings were organized during 2015, in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to facilitate a dialogue about agroecology, its benefits, challenges and opportunities focusing on regional and national levels.

The Regional meeting on agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa was held on 5-6 November 2015 in Dakar, Senegal. Nearly 300 delegates from governments, producers and social movements, private sectors, academia and agronomic research institutes, civil society, FAO officials, representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities had a unique opportunity to highlight the best agroecological practices in the region, discuss challenges for the adoption of agroecology practices as well as suggest strategies from African and non-African states.

The outcomes of the international and regional meetings highlighted the key role that agroecology can

¹ The final report of the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>

*This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page;
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Other documents can be consulted at www.fao.org*



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play in facilitating the transition to more productive, sustainable and inclusive food systems.

Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

Recognizing that agroecological initiatives and practices play diverse and important roles such as reducing rural poverty, eradicating hunger and malnutrition, achieving sustainable agriculture and development, enhancing the resilience of agriculture to climate change, and increasing involvement of traditional knowledge of local communities and indigenous people, the meeting made several recommendations related to various sectors. In this regard, FAO can continue to work with member countries to harness the benefits of agroecology, not just at the global level but especially at regional, national and local levels.

Understanding how different countries are working on this approach and how it contributes to ending hunger and malnutrition, adapting to climate change, improving environmental health and increasing social well-being can be very beneficial. In this regard, cooperation and exchanges between countries and regions, -especially through regional, South-South and triangular cooperation- can play a crucial role.

The Regional Conference is invited to take into account the outcomes of the Regional meeting on agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa, especially the recommendations put forth by the participants as detailed in **Annex 1**.

I. Background

1. The global food system is at a crossroads. The new Sustainable Development Goals state that agriculture must contribute to ending hunger and malnutrition in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. Within this challenging context, agroecological food systems are capable of providing multiple benefits by enhancing food security and nutrition, restoring and maintaining ecosystems health, delivering sustainable livelihoods to smallholders and family farmers and building resilience to adapt to climate change. Agroecology offers principles and processes that need to be adapted locally. The role of agroecology in social, economic and environmental sustainability is described in **Annex II**.

2. Seeking to gain better understanding of the role that agroecology can play in achieving an end to hunger and malnutrition, FAO organized the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in September 2014 in Rome, Italy. The Symposium brought together 400 scientists, food producers, high level officials from governments, policy makers, farmers' organizations, the private sector and NGO representatives.

3. Following the recommendations of the International Agroecology Symposium, FAO organized three regional meetings during 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to facilitate a dialogue about agroecology, its benefits, challenges and opportunities focusing on regional and national levels. This reflects the principle that effective work on agroecology must be based on regional and local realities as well as economic, social and environmental conditions.

4. The first FAO Regional Meeting on Agroecology was successfully held in Latin America and the Caribbean on 24-26 June 2015, in Brasilia, Brazil, with over 130 participants from governments, civil society, regional organizations, academia and research institutions from 14 countries.

5. A Multi-stakeholder consultation on Agroecology for Asia and the Pacific² was held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 24-26 November 2015 with over 150 participants including government officials, UN agencies, civil society organizations, INGOs, NGOs, academia, research and development institutes, universities, private sector and farmer's organizations.

6. A regional meeting on agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa was held on 5-6 November 2015 in Dakar, Senegal. Almost 300 representatives from governments, producers and social movements, private sectors, academia and agronomic research institutes, civil society, FAO officials, representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities participated in the meeting, which was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Senegal, with the opening ceremony presided by the Senegalese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Facilities.

7. In all these efforts, FAO functioned as a facilitator to enable fruitful debates and foster collaboration among a variety of actors in order to advance science, knowledge, public policies, programs and experiences on agroecology and enhance food security and nutrition at regional and national levels. FAO is supporting the strengthening of the already extensive evidence-based knowledge for agroecological approaches in agriculture. The Proceedings of the FAO International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition³ provided a first and important step in this direction. It will be important to continue to strengthen the dissemination of evidence-based knowledge and experiences in support of agroecology for food and nutrition security, especially to address some of the key questions identified at the International Symposium and regional meetings.

² For further information please see (www.fao.org/asiapacific/events/detail-events/en/c/1262/)

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4729e.pdf>

II. Agroecology in Africa: outcomes of the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa

Agroecology in Africa

8. Agroecology, stressing adaptation of agriculture to natural conditions and cycles, as well as to local needs – has been carried out by African farmers and pastoralists for millennia. Thus, while often not explicitly termed “Agroecology”, many actors and initiatives exist within sub-Saharan Africa that builds on agroecological principles.

9. Agroecology’s holistic approach - incorporating the traditional knowledge and skills of the world’s farming communities with cutting edge ecological, agronomic, economic, and sociological research, has the potential to support strong, democratically-based food systems that provide health and livelihood to small-scale, family farmers, rural communities; as well as environmental benefits.

10. The commitment of African governments to sustainable rural development, to increasing their investments in agriculture so as to enhance the livelihoods and well-being of rural populations reflects a momentum in which Agroecology has a role to play.

11. In February, 2015 representatives of producers’ organizations and social movements met at the Nyéleni Training Centre in Sélingue, Mali and produced the Nyeleni Declaration on Agroecology outlining the civil society’s view on Agroecology.

The Regional Meeting on Agroecology in Africa

12. On 5 and 6 November 2015 over 300 representatives from governments, civil society, research and the private sector participated in the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa, which was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Senegal. It was co-organized by the Government of Senegal and FAO in Dakar with the opening ceremony presided by the Senegalese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Facilities. The meeting built on FAO’s International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security & Nutrition that took place in September 2014 and FAO’s Regional Meeting on Agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean.

13. The meeting aimed at assessing the current state of agroecological practices in Africa, identify constraints, opportunities and the expectations of stakeholders; and contribute to the dynamics of agroecological development through experience sharing, and by highlighting and strengthening existing levers.

14. During the meeting, agroecological initiatives and practices were recognized as having the potential to achieve sustainable agriculture and development while reducing rural poverty, hunger and malnutrition and increasing climate resilience of agriculture. Agroecology also recognized as having the further potential to provides perspectives for rural youths and help slow the rural exodus currently occurring in sub-Saharan Africa.

15. Key stakeholders had an unique opportunity in one seating to highlight the best agroecological practices in the region, to discuss challenges for the adoption of agroecology practices as well as to suggest strategies from African and non-African states.

16. The meeting debated around four main topics :

- Agroecology, a solution to the food security and nutrition in agricultural transition in Africa
- Agroecology and enhancement of natural resources in the context of climate change
- Agroecology, social innovation, livelihoods and technology
- Public policies (including legal and institutional frameworks) to promote Agro ecology.

A. Annex 1: Recommendations of the Participants of the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in sub Saharan Africa

Recommendations from deliberations in four round tables on the themes:

- Agroecology as a Path to Food and Nutrition Security for the Agricultural Transition in Africa;
- Public Policies (including Legal and Institutional Frameworks) to Promote Agroecology;
- Agroecology: Social Innovation, Livelihoods and Technology ;
- Public Policies (including Legal and Institutional Frameworks) to Promote Agroecology;

Speakers and participants from governments, civil society, research and the private sector identified the following recommendations on Agroecology in sub-Saharan Africa:

A. Governments and policy makers, donors and technical partners, with the support of intergovernmental organizations, particularly FAO, should:

- i) Ensure producers', especially women's, youth's and indigenous peoples' access to natural resources, notably land, water and biodiversity by developing simple procedures for the acquisition, registration and securing of land tenure. In this context, the "Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests" should be implemented.
- ii) Mainstream agroecology into regional and national agricultural policies and programs including into regional economic communities and incorporate fisheries, forestry and livestock into CAADP. CAADP should develop an innovation platform on agroecology;
- iii) Create platforms to collect and exchange agroecological experiences and innovations across the African continent and at national levels;
- iv) Put in place tools that allow, among others, to review and transform current agricultural subsidy systems as well as trade and investment policies towards agroecology, and adequately finance policies and laws promoting Agroecology, especially to fund agroecology research;
- v) Launch pilot projects at territorial level such as the creation of agroecological territories;
- vi) Develop and implement public procurement policies that favour agroecological and local food production as well as intensifying South-South cooperation on agroecology;
- vii) Integrate agroecology in national research systems and in the curricula of higher education institutions, at the level of pedagogic programmes in both formal and informal training centers for producers, including farmer field schools, school farms, farmers' trainings and school gardens;
- viii) Put in place and fund an African fund for the development of agroecology.
- ix) Integrate knowledge of agricultural practices in natural conditions into education to catalyze the role of Agroecology in economic process ;
- x) Promote the development of seeds systems that address availability, access and ownership issues, including community seed systems, indigenous knowledge and extension services;
- xi) Raise awareness about the nutritional value of agroecological products;
- xii) Protect the diversity of local peasant seeds against any negative external influence;
- xiii) Incentivize local private sector actors to embrace agroecological principles;
- xiv) Formulate responsive national plans that will strengthen land use systems that promote and sustain agroecology;

- xv) Develop agroecology independently of Climate Smart Agriculture and propose to COP21 that an international protocol for agroecology be put into place and adopted by national governments

B. Academia and the research community should:

- i) Strengthen existing local knowledge, farmer-led research as well as farmers research networks with a focus on the co-creation of knowledge and participative research;
- ii) Build and strengthen the evidence base for Agroecology, collect, and better disseminate data on Agroecology to enable evidence-based decision making;
- iii) Invest more in applied agroecological research with a focus on selecting varieties and breeds directly on-farm, as well as on social and human sciences applied to agroecology;
- iv) Identify species, including livestock and trees, adapted to climate change;

C. Civil Society Organizations should:

- i) Develop networks and mobilize stakeholders to create solidarity-based economies that foster agroecology;
- ii) Encourage producers and civil society organizations to continue to promote agroecological practices at community level in rural and peri-urban areas.

D. Institution at all levels, communities and sectors should:

- i) Promote farmer-led, bottom-up, local innovation systems and practices to enhance the fundamental role of agroecology in biodiversity conservation and to strengthen the dissemination of innovations;
- ii) Take value chains and market development into account in innovations in order to make agroecology more attractive, especially to youth.

E. The Meeting:

- i) Requested the government of Senegal and the FAO Regional Office for Africa to inform the forthcoming FAO Regional Conference for Africa about these recommendations;
- ii) Invited organizations to commit to implement one or more of these recommendations;
- iii) Invited participants to commit to integrate these recommendations in their organizations.

B. Annex II: The role of Agroecology in the world and in Africa

In a scenario of climate change and a world population forecasted to grow to 9 billion by 2050, the objective of producing healthy and nutritious food in a sustainable manner becomes even more challenging. There is a need to shift to more sustainable food systems, producing more with less social, economic and environmental costs. Agroecology is one pathway to achieve this goal.

Based on the international and regional meetings facilitated by FAO and the knowledge shared and created through these, participants agreed on agroecology's main benefits, challenges and opportunities, as described below.

“Agroecology is the integrative study of the ecology of the entire food system, encompassing ecological, economic and social dimensions” . It is an important approach to move towards more sustainable food systems, whose practices, research and policies have seen exponential growth worldwide in the last decade.

Agroecology is based on the 3 pillars of sustainable development and on FAO's common vision for sustainable food and agriculture. With an emphasis on economic, social and environmental sustainability, countries can increase their food production while protecting the environment and promoting social inclusion.

Agroecology plays an important role in promoting food security and guaranteeing the human right to adequate food. A review of 154 comparisons between agroecological and conventional practices indicates that agroecology can improve farm profitability and yield. Agroecology can thus play a key role to ensure food security, improve equity and end poverty.

Agroecology ensures nutrition security and diversification of diets. Agro-ecological food systems stand out as being one of the main providers of high-quality nutritious and healthy food in a culturally appropriate way, promoting local food habits and traditional knowledge.

Agroecology can help mitigate the negative effects of climate change. By strengthening the potential of food systems to store fixed carbon and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, agroecology facilitates human adaptation to a warming climate while building more resilient agricultural systems.

Agroecology offers important opportunities for family farming in achieving sustainable food and nutrition security on the ground. Family farming, the practice which agroecology is based on, involves at least 500 million family farms worldwide. Indigenous peoples, local communities and family farmers are the key holders of agroecological knowledge, being at the center of agroecological food systems. Agroecology can provide concrete solutions for governments to promote a shift towards sustainable food systems when the appropriate enabling environment is in place.

Agroecology promotes a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership in agriculture. Agroecology promotes practices that allows youth to carry forward the permanent regeneration of knowledge, values, vision and leadership, which are critical for moving towards more sustainable food systems. Likewise, agroecology recognizes the central role of women in providing the social and knowledge bases for the evolution of sustainable food systems, by promoting gender-sensitive income security and empowerment.

Agroecology prevents environmental degradation and pollution. By minimizing the use of toxic or damaging substances into the environment, agroecology reduces agriculture's negative effects on ecosystems, ensuring sustainable food production. Main environmental benefits include:

- Maintain the soil's ecological health by preventing its erosion while preserving and rebuilding fertility;
- Prevent surface water and groundwater pollution, allowing aquifers to be recharged and meet the water needs of the environment and the communities;
- Restore ecosystem services and promote biodiversity by preventing its loss within and between farms.

Agroecology reduces food waste and losses. By relying mainly on resources within the agro-ecosystem and replacing external inputs with nutrient cycling, agroecology promotes integrated and resource-conserving farming systems. Furthermore, agroecology provides an opportunity to shorten the value chain and ensure reduction of food waste.

Agroecology provides local solutions based on local needs. By establishing strong linkages between local small-holder food producers, local economies and markets, agroecology rewards farmers who adapt and apply it in their fields with improved livelihoods. Agroecology combines local traditional practices with scientific knowledge and innovative technologies enabling adaptive local agricultural systems and context-specific solutions.

An enabling policy environment is key in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. Indigenous peoples, local communities and family farmers can overcome hunger and malnutrition while building resilience to adapt to climate change in a sustainable way through agro-ecological food systems supported by conducive policies, adequate legislation, investment, knowledge sharing, research and innovation.