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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Report on the FAO Regional Consultative Meeting on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors in Asia and the Pacific

Executive summary

The FAO Regional Consultative Meeting on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors in Asia and the Pacific region was held from 17 to 19 July 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, as a follow-up to the first Global Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors (Rome, May 2018) that was jointly convened by FAO and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Subsequent endorsements of the global dialogue outcomes were received from FAO technical committees (i.e. the Committee on Fisheries, the Committee on Forestry and the Committee on Agriculture) and from the Programme Committee entrusting FAO to develop a strategy on mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors and to organize regional dialogues in preparation for CBD's post-2020 global biodiversity framework.¹

The objective of the Regional Consultative Meeting was to engage a broad range of stakeholders from agriculture and environment sectors to exchange experiences and lessons learned on mainstreaming biodiversity, to identify their roles and contributions on concrete areas for joint actions at regional and country levels, and to provide suggestions for developing the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Around 150 participants from 30 countries across the region attended the meeting, including ministers, ambassadors, government officials, international agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and academia.

The meeting highlighted the need for joint actions across agriculture and environment sectors at different levels, including regional, national, and local communities. Key recommendations included ensuring regional inputs to implement FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors (adopted by the 163rd Session of the FAO Council in December 2019),

¹ CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including Aichi Biodiversity Targets, is expected to be updated at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to be held in Kunming, China in October 2020 and to adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework as a follow-up for the next decade.

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consistent with FAO's engagement in contributing to CBD's post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited:

- to note the recommendations from the Regional Consultative Meeting and take needed actions to promote biodiversity mainstreaming across agriculture sectors in countries;
- to provide guidance to FAO on implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors at regional and country levels in Asia and the Pacific region;
- to provide guidance on FAO's collaboration with regional and subregional partners working on biodiversity in agriculture sectors that will increase visibility and commitment on common priorities; and
- to support and facilitate dialogues and workshops at regional and country levels to increase the integration of biodiversity in agricultural policies, planning and investments and to develop cross-sectoral collaboration for the creation of joint strategies.

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Introduction

1. In recent years, the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming has been gaining greater worldwide attention. Two landmark global assessments on the state of biodiversity were launched in 2019: *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*² (FAO) and *The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*³ from the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Both reports confirmed that biodiversity is essential for food and agriculture, raising concerns about the alarming global decline of biodiversity, highlighted the urgent need for improving conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and stressed the importance of cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration among decision-makers and other stakeholders at all levels. Among the group of 17 countries identified as the world's richest in biodiversity, seven are located in the region, namely Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea.⁴ Asia and the Pacific region also has “numerous endemic species and more global biodiversity hotspots than any other region of the world”, with 17 out of 36 biodiversity hotspots.⁵
2. At the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) to the CBD held in Mexico City in 2016, the CBD welcomed FAO's announcement to act as a Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform in order to build bridges between sectors, identify synergies, align goals and develop integrated cross-sectoral approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors.⁶ The ensuing Cancún Declaration, committed to mainstream biodiversity across all agricultural sectors.⁷
3. In May 2018, FAO launched the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform with the first Global Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across the Agricultural Sectors co-organized in Rome.⁸ The outcome called upon FAO to prepare by 2020 at the latest, a strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming, setting out future activities in collaboration with partners and relevant stakeholders. In 2018, the FAO Technical Committees commended the work of FAO on biodiversity mainstreaming and expressed support to include mainstreaming biodiversity across their respective sectors as part of its strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming and contribution to the CBD's post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The Thirty-third Session of the Committee on Fisheries and the Twenty-fourth Session of the Committee on Forestry indicated the need for work plans specifically addressing biodiversity mainstreaming within their sectors.⁹ The Twenty-sixth Session of the Committee on Agriculture requested that FAO develop a strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors for

² FAO. 2019. *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*, J. Bélanger & D. Pilling (eds.). FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture Assessments. Rome. 572 pp. (<http://www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf>).

³ IPBES. *Summary for policymakers of the IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Asia and the Pacific*. 2018. p. 13. Available at: https://www.ipbes.net/system/tdf/spm_asia-pacific_2018_digital.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=28394. Cited 30/11/19.

⁴ UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre. *Megadiverse Countries*. 2014. Available at <http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/megadiverse-countries>. Cited 30/11/19.

⁵ IPBES, 2018. p. 13.

⁶ Throughout this document, the term “agriculture” or “agriculture sectors” refers to crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture.

⁷ CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3, paragraph 6. The 40th Session of FAO Conference also “welcomed FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform” and “requested FAO to facilitate, in collaboration with its partners, such as the CBD and other UN organizations, the integration in a structured and coherent manner of actions for the conservation, sustainable use, management and restoration of biological diversity across agricultural sectors at national, regional and international levels.” (C 2017/REP)

⁸ The final report is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CA1352ES>.

⁹ C 2019/23 paragraph 102 and C 2019/24 paragraph 14 d) (iv). The FAO Conference also called upon the Committee on Agriculture, the Committee on Fisheries, and the Committee on Forestry to address biodiversity as a cross-cutting issue at their meetings in 2018.

consideration by the 125th Session of the Programme Committee and 161st Session of the FAO Council, for presentation at the Forty-first Session of the FAO Conference in June 2019.¹⁰

4. The 41st Session of the FAO Conference in June 2019 mandated the Council to consider and adopt the FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors before 2020, following an inclusive consultation process. The 163rd Session of the FAO Council in December 2019 adopted the FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors.

5. During the course of 2018 and 2019, FAO organized regional consultative meetings on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors. The Regional Consultative Meeting on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors for Asia and the Pacific took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 17 to 19 July 2019.

6. The Regional Consultative Meeting on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors in Asia and the Pacific region was co-organized by FAO and the CBD Secretariat, in collaboration with the Biodiversity-based Economy Development Office under the Office of Natural Resources and Environment Policy and Planning of Thailand. The Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Water Department and the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, as part of their joint preparations for the meeting, conducted a stocktaking exercise in order to understand what is already being done to support biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors and to identify gaps, lessons learned and emerging issues relating to the enabling environment, practices, supporting tools and incentives.

7. The main objective of the meeting was to increase awareness on the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming across the agriculture sectors in the region. This encompassed engaging a broad range of stakeholders from the agriculture and environment sectors to exchange local, national and regional experiences and lessons learned (including gaps and challenges) on mainstreaming biodiversity. It also identified roles and contributions of stakeholders and concrete areas for joint actions at regional and country levels.

8. The Regional Consultative Meeting brought together 150 participants from 30 countries in the region representing agriculture and environment sectors, regional integration bodies, farmers' organizations, the private sector, policy and research institutions and different United Nations agencies.

9. The three-day meeting began with a High-Level Segment and included ministers from Bhutan, Cambodia, Islamic Republic of Iran and Myanmar. The facilitated format encouraged the dialogue among a wide range of diverse stakeholders and participants and comprised seven plenary sessions, including keynote technical presenters and open discussions; four parallel cross-thematic working group sessions (i.e. crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) chaired by participants from ministries of agriculture and environments sectors and resource presenters who reported at the plenary sessions. In addition, two thematic plenary sessions were organized: (1) Conservation and Mainstreaming of Biodiversity in Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors; and (2) Mainstreaming Biodiversity through Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems: Experiences from Asia.

10. The initial results of the stocktaking exercise of good practices and examples that contribute to biodiversity mainstreaming in agriculture sectors in Asia and the Pacific region identified 42 submissions from 19 countries, which were presented as background information at the beginning of the working group discussions.

¹⁰ C 2019/21 paragraph 47

Discussion

11. Highlights of the discussion included:

The importance of biodiversity in an agriculture context

- a. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are essential to food and agriculture. Biodiversity is critical for safeguarding food security, underpinning healthy and nutritious diets, improving rural livelihoods and enhancing the resilience of people and communities. Agriculture sectors have a great interest in conserving biodiversity because they directly rely on it for present and future production.
- b. Biodiversity ensures ecosystem services, the sustainable use of natural resources and the sustainability of food and agriculture production.
- c. Biodiversity can add value to food and agriculture production by contributing to diversifying livelihoods, increasing income, safeguarding food security and nutrition, and alleviating poverty.
- d. There is growing evidence that biodiversity for food and agriculture is declining. *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* published by FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in February 2019 presented mounting and worrying evidence that the biodiversity that underpins our food systems is disappearing, putting the future of our food, livelihoods, health and environment under threat.

Accomplishments

- a. National biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) are the key instruments for translating the convention and decisions of the COPs into national action. There has been progress in countries' efforts from the NBSAPs and country reports.
- b. FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the Country Offices have been supporting all of the biodiversity-related international conventions and working closely with CBD and other United Nations agencies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the biodiversity-related indicators.

Mainstreaming: objective and implementation

- a. It is imperative to integrate biodiversity considerations into policies and practices to ensure sustainable food and agriculture production throughout the value chains. The enabling environment for the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity for food and agriculture is currently insufficient and must be strengthened. It is still necessary to review to what extent the NBSAPs cover the agriculture sectors, and to what extent national agriculture and rural development plans have embedded biodiversity considerations. In addition, incentives for biodiversity mainstreaming along the food and agriculture production value chains are essential for establishing economic feasibility models and scaling up.
- b. Stakeholder engagement efforts will need to be multilevel and cross-sectoral, involving collaborative and participatory actions among the public and private sectors as well as among indigenous peoples and other traditional land and marine users.
- c. Awareness-raising is needed to engage stakeholders at different levels, which is necessary in the mainstreaming process.
- d. Mainstreaming needs technical support. FAO is well-positioned to take responsibility to enhance, facilitate, and accelerate awareness and capacity-building for sustainable food and agriculture production. FAO and the UN Environment Programme will lead the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, along with others. Particularly, FAO will continue to play the leading role on sustainable use and restoration of agro-ecosystems, including at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels.

- e. There are a number of common sustainable production approaches and tools which can be applied to address biodiversity concerns, such as the ecosystem approach, the landscape approach, Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), geographical indications, organic standards and certification.

12. Participants recommended:

- a. To further explore synergies among the SDGs, the Rio Conventions (i.e. CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), and ongoing initiatives/programmes/projects to address the various themes in one package. For example, mainstream biodiversity into ongoing processes (e.g. responsible investment, sustainable consumption, healthy diets) by adding biodiversity indicators.
- b. Biodiversity mainstreaming should be evidence- and knowledge-based, and further information should be collected and developed. This could encompass, for example, action to identify and analyse the existing cost-benefit effectiveness of biodiversity-friendly food and agriculture practices; identify and explore the opportunity for sustainable use of biodiversity to contribute to poverty alleviation, food security and nutrition; and establish a database and monitoring system to validate the effectiveness and efficiency of such biodiversity-friendly practices.
- c. The need to develop, demonstrate and upscale an enabling framework (i.e. legal, policy, good governance and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms), as well as economic incentives (e.g. sustainable economic models, PES).
- d. To remove barriers among sectors by using various measures (e.g. collaboration and coordination mechanisms among ministries) through the ecosystem approach, landscape approach and community-based approaches.
- e. To enhance stakeholder (including government) engagement and capacity through awareness-raising, capacity-building and participatory approaches.
- f. To diversify approaches and tools that can be used in various development stages and sectoral production contexts.

13. Recommendations for follow-up actions include:

- a. Support and facilitate dialogues and workshops at regional and country levels to increase the integration of biodiversity in agricultural policies, planning and investments and to develop cross-sectoral collaboration to create joint strategies that contribute to updating the NBSAPs. This requires setting up cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms at all levels that will initiate the mapping and harmonizing of plans to mainstream biodiversity; consulting stakeholders; and scaling up and mainstreaming biodiversity at the regional and national levels.
- b. Develop regional plans in collaboration with regional and subregional partners working on biodiversity in agriculture sectors that will increase visibility and commitment on common priorities. This will entail the development of joint work plans and activities (including resource mobilization) and the formalization of partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding with potential partners including the Asian Development Bank, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Centre for Biodiversity, the Greater Mekong Subregion and the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, among others. This implementation plan must be knowledge- and evidence-based, so that a review of ongoing initiatives, programmes and approaches could provide a starting point. Gender, youth and indigenous peoples, where relevant, should be covered by the plan.
- c. Establish a biodiversity technical network, to bring together biodiversity experts and interested practitioners in the region through e-learning to document biodiversity-friendly agricultural management practices and associated policies, tools and data that ensure

integration of sustainable use, conservation and protection of biodiversity into food systems.

Conclusions

14. The main outcome of the Regional Consultative Meeting on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors in Asia and the Pacific region was the creation of awareness and capacity-building for multistakeholders. It also contributed to FAO's work on biodiversity mainstreaming by supporting and promoting the related strategy, at both regional and global levels. Finally, the meeting permitted to reach consensus on the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming across agriculture sectors, while the recommendations developed provided strategic and technical guidance for moving forward.