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联合国粮食及农业组织 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture Продовольственная и сельскохозяйственная организация Объединенных Наций Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura منظمة الأغذية والزراعة للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Statement by the Spokesperson of the Scientific and Academic Committee

Please send any questions about this document to:
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Whereas,

We are experiencing a time of great transformation and are facing constant challenges that impact on food and agriculture, making interinstitutional coordination a key tool.

In 2020 the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, a challenge to global health requiring a "new normal" and consequently technological, social, economic, environmental and policy changes directly affecting our well-being and the ability to sustainably feed ourselves.

One of the most important challenges to agriculture is how to meet the growing demand for food in a sustainable and resilient manner; and in particular how to improve nutrition for the population.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is, on the one hand, the region richest in biodiversity and the main global exporter of food, while on the other it is the region with the highest rate of deforestation resulting from agricultural frontier expansion and it continues to be the region with the greatest social inequality on the planet.

The agricultural sector is fundamental in LAC, not only because it generates exportable raw materials (and generates foreign currency), but also due to the ability to form linkages with the agro-industry sector at national, regional and global level (promoting value added chains), employment and in particular protecting food security and sovereignty.

The availability of water, energy, arable land and essential ecosystem services varies between regions and competition for their use is increasingly intense in the face of the effects of climate change. Agri-food systems will have to cope with extreme events impacting the potential for production, distribution and even the generation of food waste and loss, which is now increasing at alarming rates all along value chains.

[1] Previously scheduled for 27 to 29 April 2020 in Managua (Nicaragua).

Youth migration from rural areas to urban districts is causing concern as regards the work force in rural and urban settings.

In recent decades global society has had to deal with climate change and problems concerning food, such as the "Triple Burden" (malnutrition, micronutrient deficiency and obesity), a syndemic which is holding back human growth and development, and jeopardizing public health and humanity's future. Owing to its geographical position and socioeconomic characteristics, LAC is one of the regions most exposed to the impacts of climate change.

The scientific and academic world is developing vital research functions and links, and is a natural partner for generating data, knowledge and science in general.

A Scientific-Academic Committee representing LAC, convened in FAO-facilitated sessions, has discussed the issues of greatest concern to the countries.

This Committee therefore wishes to present the following Statement for consideration:

1. More investment in science for innovation, development and an effective response to the crisis

- **More networked science.** The great current and future challenges can only be met by creating new knowledge which means years of constant investment and building social capital. Multi- and interdisciplinary networks or hubs are key to creating knowledge, which is considered a key input for designing policies and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Family farmer producers still have gaps in their access to technologies, information, technical support and better trade terms with different links in value chains. The majority, affected by low productivity, are abandoning rural settings and migrating to the city, creating cycles of often irreversible undercapitalization. Knowledge and innovations will be required to facilitate a technology shift on farms on all scales. A systemic approach is needed, along with the cooperation of local institutions. It is vital to encourage new models of innovation to strengthen rural extension systems and to improve the quality of life of the rural population.
- **Networks to respond to crises and health and natural disasters.** The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when the world was fighting for growth and development forces us to rethink how we work in science and the agri-food sector. While previous pandemics damaged livestock farming, the current one has hit the work force. This emphasizes the importance of supporting new work formats. Potential crises caused by pests and diseases require studies to be set up to manage risks and disasters, particularly when they can result in major humanitarian crises. Having networks of scientists is vital in all cases.
- **Increasing investment in Research, Development and Innovation (R&D&i).** Investment in R&D&i in LAC has been decreasing since the 1980s. The majority of countries currently allocate less than 1% of agricultural GDP to investment in public sector science. Better coordination should be achieved between the mechanisms of multilateral funding agencies and the private sector with the public sector, generating public assets, in order to improve the allocation of investment in R&D&i, avoid duplications and promote science funding for regional development.
- **A system for managing knowledge and communication which** effectively reaches many users, based on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) including alternative methods for those without internet access in rural areas and/or those who cannot read and write (for example community radios, voice mail in indigenous languages, etc.). Creating a networked digital Open Science and Innovation structure so that any stakeholder can access generated data and knowledge and, in addition, interact with other databases in other regions.

2. Transforming food systems to provide healthy diets for all

- **Three key components for transforming food systems: farms, land and stakeholders; and the consumer and associated value chains.** Actions should be implemented on these three levels to promote more networked farms, resilient, sustainable agro-ecosystems, and the production of nutritious, healthy food. It is vital to support technological change on farms and to improve productivity and efficiency, closing the gaps. Agro-ecosystems should be encouraged that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increase soil carbon sequestration, and that use agro-ecological production techniques to reduce the use of pesticides toxic to the environment. Agribusinesses should be developed with a view to the market and consumer preferences, but they should be environmentally friendly. Nutrient content still needs to be improved by consuming fresh, minimally processed food and developing diet diversification strategies for the population, reducing the consumption of processed and ultraprocessed food and drink. The Triple Burden (malnutrition, micronutrient deficiency and obesity), syndemics and the current COVID-19 pandemic and its association with zoonosis demonstrates the importance of food safety. The concept of "One Health" should be applied, i.e. collaborations recognizing the interrelationship between people, animals, plants and the environment and the key role of biodiversity in the provision of ecosystem services.

3. Hand in hand to achieve prosperous, inclusive rural societies

- **Inclusive, effective alliances for regional development and dialogue.** Promote effective alliances to encourage interinstitutional collaboration and dialogue around key innovation issues in LAC. Achieving technological change requires collaboration with national, regional and international stakeholders, and in particular encouraging "multi-stakeholder platforms". Foster collective action to make better use of funding, avoiding duplication of investments, reducing transaction costs, achieving sustainability in innovations and facilitating scaling.
- **Inclusion and equality for gender, youth and indigenous people.** The social and economic inclusion of vulnerable groups forms part of global development plans. The empowerment of women and indigenous peoples who have become marginalized by the lack of adequate policies is vital. It is important to regard rural producers, both male and female, as active agents of change and not as passive recipients of external aid.

4. Sustainable agriculture resilient to climate change

- **Adaptation and mitigation of climate change.** Further increases in global average temperature and a more unpredictable climate are expected, with great variability between years and seasons. There will be excess precipitation or shortage of rainfall, depending on the region, and abnormal water flows, among other events, along with the emergence of new pests and diseases, or changes in their seasonality. The varieties cultivated in a region will probably have to be switched to others adapted to the new environment. Land must be managed and thus give rise to the adaptation of all ecosystems and the essential ecosystem services they provide, creating synergies between the resilience of agriculture, mitigation and adaptation. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change will be greater around the equator, where there are middle- and low-income countries with millions of people dependent on agriculture and therefore more vulnerable to its effects.
- **Digitization of agriculture.** Basic disciplines for the development of digital tools have become an alternative solution contributing to substantial improvements in efficiency and productivity based on technology in the sector. Digital tools and on-line data management provide key information from farms, value chains and consumer distribution for decision-making at all levels. At farm level, intelligent technological solutions allow their use in agronomic practices. As regards land, they facilitate information systems and digital applications improving inter-stakeholder connections. At consumer level, they encourage access to information, different foods, traceability, and labelling systems. This aspect will require infrastructure investments in terms of connectivity and policy instruments aimed at

reducing the digital divide in rural areas, as well as the formal and informal education of children and adults.

5. Governance, institutions and legal procedures

- **Structural public policies**. Achieving an impact requires great effort, cooperation and collaboration between institutions, ultimately to create an institutional public-private ecosystem. Policy frameworks must include the promotion of structural public policies to achieve sustainable changes. In areas such as food loss and waste, healthy food, particularly in more vulnerable sectors such as early childhood, pregnancy, migrants and indigenous populations, laws governing the front label and regulating advertising have been vital in changing food environments. Furthermore, the promotion of land management policies is an aspect to be considered, in order to preserve natural resources. The same applies to regulations referring to themes of intellectual property, access to information technologies and conflicts of interest.

- **The inspection and evaluation of public policies**. This should be based on the evidence and knowledge created by the scientific and academic world. Science and academia consider themselves a strategic partner in the creation and validation of knowledge with a new collaborative and partnership-based approach. This approach will help to strengthen and build academic networks to promote cooperation with States, working hand in hand with communities, reclaiming and standardizing good practices for improving the food and agricultural system with the inclusion of multiple stakeholders.