

Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches: policy convergence process.

Request from Mohammad Hossein Emadi, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to FAO and Chair of COAG for :

‘Views on what the priority issues to be addressed during the CFS policy convergence process are in order to feed an initial zero draft of a CFS policy convergence process’.

1. During CFS46 plenary a number of delegates, including regional groups, supported using the recommendations of the HLPE report as the basis for the CFS policy convergence process. We support this recommendation.

The HLPE report is a balanced analysis of Agroecology, and the 5 recommendations are welcomed. A major problem in earlier discussions of Agroecology – as evidenced recently by the diverse, sometimes emotional interventions at the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology 3-5 April 2018 (hosted by FAO) – is a clear understanding of what this term means, and how it builds on earlier agricultural developments. Some suggestions in that Symposium indicated that Agroecology is fundamentally different from other approaches to sustainable development. That is unhelpful to the policy convergence process, which should build on existing knowledge and advances. This HLPE report notes in the executive summary:

‘There is no single, consensual definition of agroecology shared by all the actors involved, nor agreement on all the aspects embedded in this concept.

Agroecology is a dynamic concept that has gained prominence in scientific, agricultural and political discourse in recent years. It is increasingly promoted as being able to contribute to transforming food systems by applying ecological principles to agriculture and ensuring a regenerative use of natural resources and ecosystem services while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where it is produced. Agroecology embraces a science, a set of practices and a social movement and has evolved over recent decades to expand in scope from a focus on fields and farms to encompass whole agriculture and food systems. It now represents a transdisciplinary field that includes all the ecological, sociocultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption’

The executive summary goes on to note that:

There is no definitive set of practices that could be labelled as agroecological, nor clear, consensual boundaries between what is agroecological and what is not. On the contrary, agricultural practices can be classified along a spectrum and qualified as

more or less agroecological, depending on the extent to which agroecological principles are locally applied. In practice this comes down to the extent to which: (i) they rely on ecological processes as opposed to purchased inputs; (ii) they are equitable, environmentally friendly, locally adapted and controlled; and (iii) they adopt a systems approach embracing management of interactions among components, rather than focusing only on specific technologies.

This is eminently reasonable, but much of the above language could also apply to many texts on sustainable agriculture and food systems, Climate Smart Agriculture, IFAD strategic frameworks and related policies, FAO SOFA/SOFI texts, and notably FAO's Building a Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture (2014), which advances 5 principles which cover the elements described above.

In conclusion, the zero draft should take note of the precursors of 'Agroecological approaches' and experience that Member States, the UN and the R&D community have already learnt from them.

2. During CFS46 plenary, there was disagreement as to whether the report sufficiently reflected other innovative approaches. This is understandable since the HLPE report gives a lesser attention to the 'other innovative approaches' cited in the title of the HLPE report. Much of the text here is in the section on the points of convergence and divergence existing among different innovative approaches. The full text handles this better than in the Executive Summary (talking to some of the delegates, I got the impression that they may have just focused on the ES – the HLPE team leader, Fergus Sinclair also told me he had a similar impression regarding these plenary interventions). Clearly the policy convergence process needs to take account of a broad approach to other innovative approaches.

3. In recommendation 1 of this HLPE report, **PROMOTE AGROECOLOGICAL AND OTHER INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN AN INTEGRATED WAY TO FOSTER TRANSFORMATION OF FOOD SYSTEMS**, this report notes that:

Specifically, CFS should consider the emerging importance of the concept of 'agency' and the opportunity to add it as a fifth pillar of FSN with the view to progress towards the realization of the right to adequate food.

And this is the substance of recommendation 4, **STRENGTHEN AGENCY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, EMPOWER VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND ADDRESS POWER INEQUALITIES IN FOOD SYSTEMS**

This is a principal focus of, amongst others, the CSM and Right to Food Delegations at CFS 46, and a reason that they hold 'Agroecological approaches' to be different to other approaches. Clearly this aspect should be aligned with the work developing concurrently on the UN Decade of Family Farming (also a plenary agenda item in CFS 46). In this context, the Chair of the HLPE, Patrick Caron, at the 3 July launch of the ES of this report noted that the 3 barriers to the transformation of agriculture afflicting the different FSN stakeholders were i) conflict of interest, ii) power asymmetry iii) lack of knowledge

4. During CFS46 plenary economic outcomes were another area of discussion, with some saying that the report did not fully consider the economic outcomes of agroecology. This needs further consideration in the policy convergence process. This is starkly illustrated this week by the Supreme Court of India calling on Delhi's neighbouring States to do something about the untenably high levels of pollution in the Delhi atmosphere. A key factor appears to be farmers in the Northern states of India burning stubble. Those farmers are not prepared to risk new approaches, such as the 'Agroecological approach' of conservation agriculture since with such an approach, they may be economically worse off. Farmers in general, and especially poor smallholder farmers, can not consider or risk new approaches unless the benefits - especially the economic benefits - are clear.

This is of course the reason for recommendation 5: **ESTABLISH AND USE COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND MONITORING FRAMEWORKS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS**, and develop practical, scientifically grounded and comprehensive performance metrics and indicators of agriculture and food systems as a basis for assessment, policy implementation and investment decisions, including total factor productivity of livelihoods, land equivalent ratio multi-functionality of landscapes and ecological footprint of food systems, as well as impacts on beneficial organisms, dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes, women's empowerment, income stability and employment conditions, as appropriate.

And the associated recommendation 3: **STRENGTHEN SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND RECONFIGURE KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND SHARING TO FOSTER CO-LEARNING**

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5 November 2019

