

Concept Note

Multi-Stakeholders Consultation on Agroecology for Asia and the Pacific

**24-26 November 2015
Bangkok, Thailand**

Background

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in particular its Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) is organizing a Regional Meeting on Agroecology for Asia and the Pacific in November 2015. This event derives from the context of a global and regional growing interest in the issue of Agroecology expressed by governments, civil society and academia.

Following FAO's Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition held in September 2014 in Rome (final report available at website: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>) and as Agroecology has to be based on local and regional realities as well as environmental, economic and social conditions, FAO decided to hold regional events in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The regional meetings may be raised during the Regional Conferences scheduled for 2016 and the implementation of RAP Regional Rice Initiative.

Agroecology was first brought to global public forum as alternate to conventional and industrial agriculture by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) in 2008. The landmark study was convened by the world's renowned international development agencies, including the FAO, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, World Bank, and WHO involving over 400 scientists, and endorsed by 59 governments. The study highlighted the importance of agroecological practices in bringing sustainability to agricultural production and boosting capacities of agroecosystems to provide more effective and efficient services and products while also enhancing farmers' incomes and livelihoods, improving public health and reviving ecosystem resilience.

For what regards Asia, while the term "Agroecology" is not often used, there is a wealth of initiatives, production systems, networks and organizations, which are based on agroecological principles. These initiatives and practices aim for goals as diverse as reducing rural poverty, the eradication of hunger and malnutrition; achieving sustainable agriculture and development, increase climate resilience of agriculture, move towards reducing dependency on external agro-chemicals and the increased involvement of traditional knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples, especially in the areas of community-level water conservation and women's knowledge of seed-saving and exchange. FAO's own work in Asia, through its new Strategic Framework and notably its Strategic Objective 2 and the Regional Rice Initiative, puts the sustainability of the production of agricultural goods and services at the heart of FAO's efforts to end hunger and malnutrition in the region. Historically FAO's work in

the region has inspired programmes on Farmer Field Schools and Integrated Pest and Production Management, both approaches that can be seen to reflect agroecological principles well. Other parallel initiatives to promote agro-ecological approach include FAO's "Save and Grow" agricultural development paradigm, Zero-hunger initiative; promotion of family farming and ICT in agriculture, climate resilient agriculture, social protection programme; addressing malnutrition; reduction of food losses and wastes, save food campaign, and declaration of "Soil Health Year-2015".

The increase in science, practices and civil society engagement in Agroecology all over the world has also included Asia. With the threats climate change poses to agriculture and food security, Agroecology is increasingly recognized as a key approach in tackling hunger and malnutrition while simultaneously minimizing the impact agri-production has on environment. FAO members are also starting to embrace the concept of Agroecology as is reflected e.g. by the participation of a Vice-Minister from Japan at the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition at FAO HQ in Rome last September (final report available at website: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>). In China, agroecology is believed to respond to a national food safety concern; in fact, China already has proposed legislation on sustainable agriculture and food safety (as stated at the Ecoforum in Guiyang 2014). The Ministry of Agriculture largely promotes Green Food standards (2005) – that are somewhat similar to integrated production. In Cambodia, the Ministry of Agriculture set up a Sustainable Rice Intensification (SRI) Secretariat under its Department of Agronomy and Agricultural Land Improvement (DAALI) and in collaboration with the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture CEDAC, as well as having included practices related to SRI in the governments National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) and policy frameworks for 2006-2010. In Lao PDR, the government is also supportive of Conservation Agriculture, which is showcased by the government hosting an ASEAN workshop on Conservation Agriculture in July 2015. Additionally research institutes, civil society organizations and social movements have been using the concept of agroecology for decades in both research and practices. This is showcased by the French research institutes CIRAD & INRA defining Agroecology as one of their priorities. CIRAD has a number of agroecology research projects in the RAP region including several networks like Cansea active in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam. In January 2105, a document titled "Agro-ecology: India's Journey to Agricultural Prosperity" prepared by UPLIFT, an Indian NGO, summarized the development in this field in India and globally. The document highlighted the importance of agro-ecological agriculture in Indian context to ensure food and nutrition security, enhancement of livelihoods and environmental sustainability in a country home to nearly one-sixth of world population.

On a more political level, ASEAN, through its Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and specifically with German support has been working for years on topics related to sustainable agriculture and agroecology, including ASEAN Guidelines on the Regulation, Use and Trade of Biological Control Agents for government officers and SMEs. Another example of regional collaboration on Agroecology is the Asia Regional Organic Standard (AROS) developed through a public-private partnership of stakeholders in East, South-East and South Asia under the auspices of the GOMA project, led by the FAO, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the UNCTAD. Japan and China are also both supporters of FAO's *Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems* programme which is embedded in agroecological principles.

On the level of practices and networks of practitioners, a regional project on promoting the Agroecology Transition in the Greater Mekong Basin implemented by a French consortium of a research center, Cirad, and a NGO, Gret, is starting this year. This project intends to strengthen the existing Conservation Agriculture Network in South East Asia (CANSEA / Cirad) and at promoting the emergence of a new regional agro-ecological learning alliance in South East Asia (ALiSEA / Gret) aiming at strengthening knowledge and experience sharing among agroecological initiatives and actors, at increasing the visibility and the credibility of agroecological movement towards policy makers and consumers, and at scaling up the development and adoption of agro-ecological practice among farmers. Asian Encounters on Agroecology have occurred in 2010 (Sri Lanka) and 2012 (in Thailand and the Philippines). Additionally, groups such as MASIPAG (the Philippines), the Korean Womens' Peasant Organization (South Korea), Nouminren and the Nouminren Youth Association (Japan) support sustainable agriculture and agroecology as foundations of farmers' livelihoods, sustainability, and food sovereignty.

The relevance and urgency of this agroecological approach is felt more acutely in Asia than in any other parts of the world where the challenge to continue agricultural intensification now also demands protection of agro-ecosystems from further degradation and damage, their revival and revitalization. A momentum is building up in the Asian region and a coalition of stakeholders is emerging that favour scaling up of agroecological agriculture by strengthening environmentally sustainable and productive agro-ecosystems.

This effort is in conformity with all five Strategic Objectives of FAO and five regional priority objectives of FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific supported by big projects and programmes being implemented in this region by FAO, like REDD++, BOBLME, Pesticide Risk Management project, strengthening agricultural marketing information systems, capacity building in the implementation of ITPGRFA and food safety standards in ASEAN countries and others.

FAO intends to create a platform for an informed debate with net neutrality to push the issue further in this region with participation of government officials, UN agencies, CSOs, INGOs, NGOs, academics and research and development institutes, university, farmer's organizations, and individuals.

The agenda of each of the regional events should be set by the region itself, according to the experiences, needs and priorities of its stakeholders. In Asia and the Pacific, emphasis will be placed on dialogue around the scientific basis and the experiences of implementing agroecology; an analysis of the possibility of the establishment of a regional platform for cooperation for the promotion of Agroecology as a strategy to guarantee food security and nutrition, in addition to actions which strengthen Family Farming and Indigenous and Traditional Peoples' communities.

Objectives

The regional meeting should highlight existing best practices in the region, as well as challenges and strategies to overcome them. In collaboration with the key actors of

Agroecology: food producers and social movements, including women's organizations engaged in food and agriculture issues, academia and agricultural research institutes, government representatives, FAO officials and representatives from traditional and indigenous peoples. This way the event will create the conditions to strengthen Agroecology at the country-level, while enhancing the opportunities for regional integration.

Specific objectives:

- To assess the current status of agro-ecological agricultural development, identify challenges in the adoption of agroecology and future opportunities for its development in Asia
- To exchange and share knowledge, experience, encountered problems, and available technologies and methods (such as farmer to farmer and farmer to researcher networks) in order to learn from each other's experience and lessons on agro-ecological agriculture
- To identify constraints and opportunities for the further development of agro-ecological agriculture in Asia, including access to technology and productive resources, social inclusion, delivery of support services, value chain, including processing and marketing in the context of food and nutrition security
- To develop regional and possibly sub-regional networks/forum on Agro-ecological agriculture in Asia
- To identify priority action, relevant policy options and recommendations for promotion of agro-ecological agriculture in Asia.

The anticipated outputs include:

- Country status on adoption of agro-ecological approach in agricultural development, lessons learnt, opportunities and future plan documented and shared
- Knowledge shared and experiences learnt on the agro-ecological agriculture with greater attention to policy, research, incl. farmer-research networks & outreach programme, delivery of support services, marketing and value chain including processing and marketing, capacity building on rural-level production planning in Asian countries
- The basis for future work on farmer-researcher and farmer to farmer networks in the region
- Priority action, relevant policy options and recommendations to promote agro-ecological agriculture identified and agreed including the basis for providing guidance for the development of regional, sub-regional and national policy initiatives related to Agroecology
- A regional network/forum
- Elements of an awareness campaign for a communication strategy around Agroecology and its relevance for the region
- A comprehensive report reflecting outcomes of the consultation

Organization

The organization of the regional meeting will be carried out by the FAO Regional Coordinator, Subash Dasgupta and his task force and members from FAO HQ (Caterina Batello and Remi Cluset), who will be supported by an Advisory Panel composed by representatives from Government of the host country, Scientists, CSOs, and NGOs. The total members of the Committee will be around 15.

As laid out in the Concept Note on the Regional meetings approved by FAO's Director-General:

“Under the leadership and chairmanship of SO2 Coordinator and Caterina Batello acting as Secretary, a Secretariat will be established including at least one representative from each technical department appointed by FO-ADG, FI-ADG, ES-ADG, a representative from NR, a representative from OCC, OPC and the Regional Coordinators from the three regional offices, nominated by the Regional ADGs upon request of DDN. Based on HQ's experience in organizing the International Symposium on Agroecology, the Secretariat will, in coordination with the Regional Coordinators, provide support, on issues related to the following aspects necessary to ensure successful meetings such as: preparation of agenda, identification of participating experts, coordinating the Scientific Committee, updating of web site information and coordination with FAO Strategic Objectives, especially S02.

Three Regional Coordinators will establish a regional team in charge of the organization of the regional meetings. The Regional Coordinators will be responsible for the organization of their respective regional meetings including: administrative matters, invitations to participants and travel, translation of technical and advocacy messages, organization of training sessions and/or organization of special topics of regional interest, identification of expected outputs and related regional processes for follow up activities. The Regional Coordinators will also take responsibility for coordination with the civil society, private sector and other partners, and they will request assistance from the Secretariat, particularly from OPC, on this on an ad-hoc basis.

The Secretariat and Regional Coordinators will jointly work and decide in a consensus manner on issues related to the political and policy aspects, the agenda, the list of invited speakers and participants as well as the expected outputs. In addition, the Secretariat under the guidance of OCC will provide assistance for the coordination of agroecology communication strategy, tools and contacts.”

Additionally, and based on the concept note and the earlier Scientific Committee an Advisory Panel is to be built. For its specific functions please refer to the attached Terms of Reference of the Advisory Panel.

Financing

Part of the resources for the implementation of the Seminar (USD 50 000) are allocated through seed funding from HQ made available by the Director-General. An additional estimated USD 50 000 will be necessary and the regional office will make these funds available through its regular budget funds.

Participants

Overall around 110 participants are expected to participate, of which 34 participants (14 from the governments, 8 from CSOs, 2 from NGOs and 10 from Academia) will be funded by FAO. Remaining participants will thus have to be self-funded.

Government representatives should ideally be the managers responsible for actions to promote sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture, agroecology or family farming and indigenous peoples and local communities. The 8 slots for Civil Society will be filled by civil society itself. As is common procedure for FAO, this identification of participants to be funded will be made by the IPC in collaboration with OPC and should include producer associations and movements, agro-ecological organizations and movements, as well as organizations of women, youth and indigenous and traditional communities. Some of these representatives might be speakers. In this case, IPC will be asked to consider the background of participants in their own selection process. Additionally FAO representatives from key countries in the region (e.g. India, China, Bangladesh, Lao PDR) might be invited to this meeting.

Overall participation could thus look as the following:

1. Country Representatives nominated by the Government – (30 participants-15 countries)
2. Representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – 10 participants
3. Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) – 10 participants
4. Representatives of Farmers' Organization/Associations – 10 participants
5. Representatives of Academic and Research Institutions – 10 participants
6. Representatives of the Private Sector – 10 participants
7. Representatives of the Diplomatic Missions – 5 participants
8. Representatives of Donors and Development Partners – 10 participants
9. Distinguished Keynote/Lead Speakers – 5 participants
10. Representatives of Indigenous Organizations – 5 participants
11. Representatives of FAO – 5 participants

In order to integrate the overall organization of the other two regional meetings and strengthen the dialogue, FAO focal points and a limited number of key representatives from the Latin America and Caribbean and Africa regions will be invited to participate.

Potential topics to discuss

The seminar will last three days, but an additional day for specific participants to lay the foundation for around farmer- research networks and further work on landscape-level approaches to agroecological production in Asia may be planned (not presently part of the agenda). The first day may be a separate meeting amongst stakeholders, particularly civil society, to discuss their specific inputs. The second and third day will be set aside for discussions of selected topics. A provisional list, modeled on the agenda of the Regional Symposium in Latin America and Africa will be suggested to the Advisory Panel.