Consultation on the HLPE V0 Draft report

“Agro ecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition”

Dear members of the HLPE team,

Oxfam International greets this draft report for providing the opportunity to engage around the important topic of Agroecology and highlighting its contribution to sustainable agriculture and food system for an enhanced food security and nutrition. However we think the report could be strengthened to reinforce this link, and so serve as a guide for the work of the CFS on agro ecological approaches.

Oxfam is an international confederation of 19 organizations working together with partners and local communities in more than 90 countries. One person in three in the world lives in poverty. Oxfam is determined to change that world by mobilizing the power of people against poverty.

1. **Overarching comments on the Zero Draft:**

We are positive to find elements such as social movements in the definition of Agroecology and that many key topics are treated in this draft report. Overall however, we find the document requires coherence in its structure, would benefit from a longer introduction giving it a better framework and structure. Some parts are redundant, (challenges of Agro-ecological approaches appear in par 1.3 but also in 2 points of 3.2). The recommendations are very light and not well connected with the rest of the report.

- The framework from which the analysis of the paper results misses out on a very important point: rights-based approaches are **not** innovative approaches. The pillars of food security and the **rights-based approach with the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition (RtAFN)** are at the core of the CFS reform and of the creation of the HLPE. Those should frame the whole report and should remain as an overarching framework on which the rest of the analysis should be based and the different innovations evaluated on.

- Innovations in this report are coupled with technological advancement and do not necessarily follow the same motives. It is also not appropriate to put at the same level innovations that are systemic and innovation that only have a limited scope and therefore impact. Moreover some of the innovative approaches such as climate-smart agriculture, nutrition –sensitive agriculture, sustainable intensification and value-chains approach are technical approaches used by industrial systems and should be identified as such. Therefore, it seems relevant to frame the definition of innovations within the concepts exposed previously of **innovative approaches towards the realization of RtAFN and FSN.**
Following the gap mentioned in the point above, the list of other innovations seems arbitrarily chosen and includes some that are part of AE approaches and therefore cannot be presented as divergent options: permaculture, agroforestry, and presenting it this way doesn’t serve the definition of AE as a holistic approach. To better understand the logic and the coherence of the report, it may be important to have an introductory paragraph on the methodology for choosing the different innovative approaches that are in the report (apart from agroecology) to understand for example why some approaches which can be considered as belonging to agroecology (eg. organic agriculture, agroforestry, permaculture) have been considered as different approaches and why the others have been chosen as potentials for responding to FSN issues.

The report misses the systemic angle which is crucial when thinking about sustainable food systems. Agroecology, in all its components (environmental, social and cultural, economic and political), allows addressing the question of the transformation of food systems in a systemic way and with a holistic vision. It is necessary when addressing agroecology to state the necessity of its contribution to a transition towards more sustainable food systems.

Agroecological approaches contribute to ensure sustainable and resilient agricultural and food systems: however the report does not stress sufficiently on its contribution to adaptation to climate change and mitigation of human GHG emissions. Agroecology contributes to increasing the level of biodiversity, building healthier soils, improving water conservation and water harvesting in rainfed regions, optimizing increases in yields, increasing carbon sequestration.

Whereas agroecology seems to tick most of the criteria responding to SFS for FSN it is never written explicitly that this approach should be privileged and no recommendations have been formulated this way. Evidence shows that agro ecological approaches contribute to food security and nutrition and right to food in four ways: enhancing yields substantially (availability), boosting urban agriculture (availability), reducing poverty (accessibility) and ensuring the adequate character of food (adequacy).

Agroecological approaches is also about reducing poverty and this point has not been thoroughly addressed in this first draft. It is nonetheless a very crucial point to make as reducing poverty increases the accessibility to food. AE approaches increase on-farm net incomes, maintain or increase on farm employment, and increase employment beyond the farm (by the creation of new activities and food supply chains).

The rationale “can agroecology feed the world” misses out a big part of the story: agroecology is first about transition, it consists in designing and applying an adequate strategy for managing a transition towards more sustainable agricultural systems that can improve sustainability in the particular context considered, through means that are adapted to local conditions. Moreover AE is context dependent, so a comparison with other models on the basis of productivity ‘can-it-feed-the-world’ type is very difficult to apply and potentially unfavourable to agroecology. It is necessary to evaluate AE on the base of social, economic and environmental aspects. The report should also include the concept of externalities (positive or negative) associated with the different approaches.

It is positive that the report includes references to local knowledge, however it is presented, even in the title as ‘opposed’. This part should be presented in section 1 and should explore the following points:
Agroecology combines scientific inquiry with indigenous knowledge, as well as farmers’ innovation and community-based innovation for shaping sustainable farming systems, stressing that agroecology is first and foremost a bottom-up process in which farmers take the front seat.

A fundamental feature of agroecology as a holistic agricultural transition process is the systematic search for the best combinations of techniques and strategies, instead of relying on a few standardized best practices.

- We find the contribution of women not developed enough and the part ‘acknowledge and enhance the specific role of women and youth for innovation’ is very light in content and statement. On the one hand women contribute to agro ecological transition, they play a crucial role as transmitters of knowledge, preservers of knowledge and innovation leaders. On the other hand they benefit from agro ecological approaches (agroecology relies on very few to no external inputs, and access to these inputs is often a difficulty for women smallholder farmers) and the agro ecological transition can have an enormous potential to empower women and make a difference in reducing gender inequalities. It can indeed allow women to play a key role as advocates for change, for example, in India, thousand women advocated for the inclusion of millets as key grains for FSN in public procurement programs and public policies successfully.

2. **Specific comments to particular sections of the Zero Draft:**

Section 1:

- Box 2 “Agroecological approaches and practices to control Fall Armyworms in Africa”: it is positive to include case-studies to illustrate agro ecological approaches, however we cannot subscribe to the statement that they can be integrated “to existing efforts to improve farmer incomes and resilience through sustainable intensification and climate smart agriculture” as they are different practices and should not be linked.
- Box 4 “A consolidated set of agroecological principles” includes social equity and responsibility, which is very positive, but effort could be made on the presentation so that the principles are better balanced in between overarching pathways (and it could be possible as some are relevant across categories)
- The table 1 “Scale of application of Agroecological principles and contributions to food security and nutrition”: it is unclear how the Scale application and the Contribution to food security were evaluated, on which basis.
- The part 1.2.3 “Contributions of Agroecology to the SDGs” is positive but the contribution of agroecology to specific SDG2 has to be enhanced much more as the focus of the report is contribution to FSN.
- Definition 2 in part 1.4, could be re-arranged as followed for more clarity: “An agroecological approach to FSN recognizes that agri-food systems are coupled social-ecological systems from production of food to its consumption with all that goes on in-between. An agroecological approach to FSN involves agroecological science, agroecological practices and an agroecological social movement as well as their holistic integration to address FSN. Agroecological approaches favor the use of natural processes over external inputs, closed cycles with minimal negative externalities and stress the importance of local knowledge and participatory processes which develop knowledge and practice through experience, as well as more conventional scientific methods, and address social inequalities.”

Section 2:
Table 3 “comparison table between the nine approaches to innovations in sustainable food system” arrives too early in the report, as it should come after the presentation of all innovative approaches. It is also not sufficiently comprehensive, and the codification used for comparing the different innovations in regard of these different ‘key aspects’ are not clear. This presentation suggests a coexistence of models without taking into account how some models such as climate-smart agriculture, or sustainable intensification can undermine agroecological principles. In addition, the table presents errors as agroecology does imply working on governance issues at other levels than just the local level. The development of agroecology is inextricably linked to a political and democratic transformation and agroecological transition is inseparable from respect of rights, people’s empowerment and appreciation of people’s knowledge. This table could be kept at the end of the presentation of all innovative approaches, and should be followed by a narrative stating clearly the advantage of Agroecology (which, for the moment in the table meets 14 of the 17 aspects for addressing FSN).

Figure 6 puts at the same level all innovative approaches when there is no evidence that these models can coexist and it puts at the same level systemic innovations and technical innovation that have a limited scope without taking into account the possibility of their incompatibility or the risk they present for each other. Therefore, graphically putting them all at the same level and not making a distinction of the contribution to the different principles and pillars of SFS for FSN reinforces this lack of consideration for a systemic approach and the notion of coexistence of models. Furthermore it is written a few lines above that “agroecology has a distinct and well-articulated approach to innovation, encompassing transformations along the entire food systems” which shows that agroecology has a crucial role for enhancing FSN.

On Climate Smart Agriculture, the HLPE should present the controversies that climate-smart agriculture has raised, especially the lack of excluding criteria, which allows any technology to enter this framework. Without a definition with clear criteria, there is no guarantee that CSA can answer the objectives of FSN. On p 49, the HLPE presents the contributions of CSA to FSN. Some of those contributions are questionable, such as the contribution to poverty reduction, the promotion and safeguard of agro biodiversity, the engagement of women and marginalized groups and the promotion of synergies and reduction of trade-offs. There is no scientific evidence provided for those elements and the HLPE cannot take on an ideological approach here.

Part 2.4 “Reducing food losses and waste” is indeed contributing to sustainable food systems but it is not clear if it is considered as an innovative approach, or transversal. The way of presenting it is oddly situated in the report.

Section 3:

Part 3.2 “Diverging narratives” has three points on agroecology when it already has a whole part on contested areas (1.3), and other innovations (like CSA) are not subject to the same questions (how can they feed the world). Also a diverging narrative appears on GMOs, when this technology is not part of the innovative approaches (and rightfully shouldn’t be part of), so it doesn’t seem there is a justification to address this point at that stage of the report.

Chapter 3.2.6, on GMOs is based on outdated data and does not address well the environmental political and social impacts of all GMO crops. This part, if kept, should address the following issues on the risks of GMOs development:
- It reduces autonomy of the farmers (prohibiting them to save their seeds)
- It leads to biodiversity reduction
- It has harmful impacts on the environment
- It increases the vulnerability of farming systems
- It increases the economic costs for peasants and undermines local practices for securing food and economic sustainability

- 3.22 and 3.2.4 could be included in Part 1.3 “contested areas and knowledge gaps in agroecology” in a more global discussion about contribution of AE to FSN.

Section 4:

- Some enabling conditions could be added to the list that are missing so far: supporting farmer to farmer networks, which are crucial for the dissemination of information (link with 4.3.2), the role of agricultural and trade policies in supporting peasants and their access to productive resources
- Part 4.3 should recall that the advantage of Agroecology in responding to community priorities as Agroecological transition is based on bottom-up processes in which farmers take the front seat. Agroecological farming is knowledge-intensive and based on techniques that are not delivered top-down but developed on the basis on farmer’s knowledge, experimentation and innovation, combined with modern agroecological science

Recommendations:
Overall the recommendations need to be strengthened as they do not link directly with the content of the report and even formulate new concepts.
A specific recommendation on enabling conditions for AE transition to reach FSN within more SFS is needed.
However some good elements should be maintained, specifically:
- Recommendation 3: Recognise the role of policy over access to natural resources;
- Recommendation 4: Support equitable and sustainable food value chains (while linking it with n°7.); This recommendation has been formulated in view of the support for marketing of agroecological products, it is therefore necessary to address it in the report.

- Recommendation 5: Leverage public programs to foster sustainable food systems for FSN;
- Recommendation 6: Foster Democratic and participatory approaches for policy development and implementation
- Recommendation 8. Reorient the international governance system, towards SFS for FSN. This recommendation should include the CNUCC and the CBD.

The recommendations should clearly target policy makers and therefore should suggest proposals to strengthen agroecology and the approaches that are proven to contribute to the Right to Food and FSN. They should present key options in terms of public policies and investments to strengthen the transition towards agroecology and focus on the role public policies have to leverage agroecology and SFS for FSN: land tenure, short circuits, and local markets, adopting a territorial approach, empowering local communities to take part in local and territorial governance, remodelling indicators.

It is also relevant within the recommendations to expose the current policies and investments that undermine agroecology and other valuable approaches, and advocate for their discontinuation when proven inadequate. Lastly the recommendations to policy makers need to stress the importance of a policy convergence process to attain FSN and RtAFN.