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SCALING UP AGROECOLOGY TO ACHIEVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Outcomes of the 2nd International Symposium and way forward

Executive Summary

In response to the growing interest in agroecology as a holistic response to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), FAO organized an International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in Rome in 2014, and a series of regional multi-stakeholder seminars from 2015 to 2017¹. The seminars showed evidence on how agroecological approaches and innovations can efficiently facilitate transitions towards sustainable agriculture and food systems, given the appropriate enabling environments. The seminars also provided references on current gaps and challenges, stressing the need to further incorporate agroecological approaches within FAO's programme of work to scale up agroecology at all levels. Following guidance by Member States and building on the outcomes of this process, FAO organized the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, held in Rome, on 3-5 April 2018. The Symposium synthesized and built on the outcomes of the first symposium and the regional seminars and in cooperation with major partners launched the "Scaling-up Agroecology Initiative", to move from dialogue to action in order to achieve the SDGs.

This paper summarizes the main outcomes of the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, and gives an overview of the "Scaling-Up Agroecology Initiative" (the Initiative). It also draws attention to the need for continued support in order to further strengthen agroecological approaches within FAO's programme of work and ensure an efficient and coherent implementation of the Initiative.

¹ For the outcomes of these seminars please refer to "Catalyzing dialogue and cooperation to scale up agroecology: Outcomes of the FAO regional seminars on agroecology – Summary <http://www.fao.org/3/I9035EN/i9035en.pdf>

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. There is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone, yet 815 million people go hungry. As reflected in SDG2, food security requires a holistic approach to all forms of malnutrition, ensuring productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, the resilience of food production systems and the sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources.
2. Integral to FAO's Common Vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, agroecology is a key holistic response to the multiple and interrelated challenges faced by food systems – including continued poverty and hunger in the context of degrading natural resources, loss of biodiversity and climate change. Agroecology applies ecological principles - such as recycling, resource use efficiency, reducing external inputs, diversification, integration, soil health and synergies - for the design of farming systems that strengthen the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while considering the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.
3. Agroecological approaches and innovations are based on the co-creation of knowledge, combining science with the traditional, practical and local knowledge of producers. Agroecology empowers producers and communities as key agents of change.
4. There is evidence that agroecological innovations enable a shift from flow-through nutrient management to a nutrient recycling model, with increased optimization of natural processes such as biological nitrogen fixation and mycorrhizal relationships, enhancing overall ecosystem services.
5. More diversified production systems can also increase resilience against climate change, diversify farmers' sources of income, contributing to reduced economic risks and poverty eradication.
6. In response to the above mentioned challenges and to the growing interest in agroecology, FAO organized an International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in Rome in 2014, and a series of regional multi-stakeholder seminars from 2015 to 2017². The seminars showed evidence on how agroecological approaches and innovations can effectively facilitate transitions towards more sustainable agriculture and food systems, provided that the appropriate enabling environment is given. The seminars also highlighted current gaps and challenges, stressing the need to further incorporate agroecological approaches within FAO's programme of work to scale up agroecology at all levels.
7. The seminars further stressed that agroecological principles and innovations are not yet widely and sufficiently incorporated in the current agricultural development models. In this line, a recent publication showcasing an analysis of FAO's 2018-2019 Work Plan, states that agroecology accounts for eight percent of FAO's results planned for 2018-2019 that support transitions to sustainable food and agriculture. A significant part (47 percent) of FAO's work to be implemented over 2018- 2019 could be shaped to upscale agroecology and to accelerate transitions towards more sustainable food and agriculture and to support countries in achieving the SDGs³.
8. In guiding countries to transform their food and agricultural systems, to mainstream sustainable agriculture on a large scale, and to achieve Zero Hunger and other SDGs, the following 10 Elements emanated from the FAO regional seminars on agroecology⁴: *Diversity; synergies; efficiency; resilience; recycling; co-creation and sharing of knowledge* (describing common characteristics of agroecological systems, practices and innovative approaches); human and social values; culture and

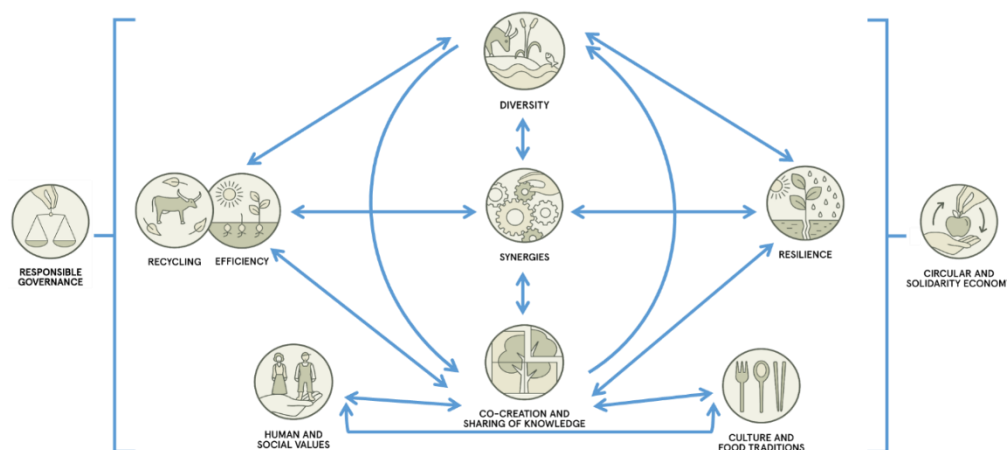
² For the outcomes of these seminars please refer to “Catalyzing dialogue and cooperation to scale up agroecology: Outcomes of the FAO regional seminars on agroecology – Summary <http://www.fao.org/3/I9035EN/i9035en.pdf> The 10 elements on agroecology, FAO 2018. <http://www.fao.org/3/I9037EN/i9037en.pdf>

³ Transitions towards sustainable food and agriculture, an analysis of FAO's 2018-2019 Work Plan. FAO, 2018. <http://www.fao.org/3/I9007EN/i9007en.pdf>

⁴ The 10 elements of agroecology, FAO 2018. <http://www.fao.org/3/I9037EN/i9037en.pdf>

food traditions (context features); circular and solidarity economy; responsible governance (enabling environment).

Table 1. The 10 elements on Agroecology



9. Outcomes of the seminars were presented to FAO governing bodies. The 40th Session of the FAO Conference “called on FAO to continue to strengthen its normative and science and evidence-based work with particular attention to agroecology.” (C 2017/REP).

10. Following guidance provided by Member States, FAO organized the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, held in Rome, on 3-5 April 2018: “Scaling-up Agroecology to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals”. In cooperation with major partners, the Symposium launched the “Scaling-up Agroecology Initiative”, to move from dialogue to action and scale-up and scale-out agroecology at all levels, in order to achieve the transformative spirit of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a holistic manner..

II. MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON AGROECOLOGY

11. This section contains a brief account of the Chair’s Summary of the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, which represents an attempt by the Chair to capture the richness of the contributions presented during the Symposium by different stakeholders and experts.

12. The 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology, held in Rome, on 3-5 April 2018, brought together more than 700 participants with representatives from 72 governments, about 350 non-state actors’ organizations, and representatives of six UN organizations. Participants discussed solutions, experiences and practices with a good potential to be scaled up. The Symposium also provided support to the notion that time has come to scale up agroecology.

13. The single focus on increasing yield, is progressively viewed as limiting and environmentally-costly, and thus not sustainable. It is broadly recognized that in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is an urgent need to promote transformative changes in how food is produced, processed, transported, distributed and consumed. Agroecology is seen by many to offer multiple benefits, including for increasing food security and resilience, boosting livelihoods and local economies, diversifying food production and diets, promoting health and nutrition, safeguarding natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem functions, improving soil fertility and soil health, women’s empowerment, and preserving local cultures and traditional knowledge systems.

14. The importance of conducive legal and regulatory frameworks for transformative change towards sustainable agriculture and food systems is broadly recognized. Agroecology is increasingly being recognized as a promising approach in facilitating and concretizing such a transformation. It puts emphasis on the active participation of family farmers⁵, in particular small-scale food producers, women and youth empowering them in dialogue spaces of public policies. This will help to provide the drive for policy and institutional changes and investments that are supportive of using agroecology to transform food and agricultural systems toward sustainability.

15. Fostering diversity on farms, strengthening local food systems, valuing traditional knowledge, ensuring equity and access to land and economic resources, and respecting the multiple food cultures around the world are understood as core components of agroecology.

16. Twenty-eight countries worldwide are already promoting agroecology through public policies. However, often these policies are not effectively implemented due to missing instruments, failure to allocate the necessary resources, or inconsistencies and incoherence with other legal frameworks hindering transitions to sustainability. Furthermore, the impact of agroecological practices remain almost invisible in official statistics, which makes it difficult to monitor its progress and further develop appropriate instruments.

17. An important outcome of the Symposium was the launch of the “Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative” (the Initiative, see Chapter III) together with major UN partners. The Initiative is proposed as a way forward and as a strategic approach to promote and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG2. However, the Initiative shows how agroecology has the capacity to contribute to almost all SDGs in providing an integrated, comprehensive and holistic approach.

18. Based on the outcomes of the regional processes, the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology and the work areas of the Initiative, FAO’s continued commitment to agroecology has been highlighted, including the broad recognition of the need to support countries and engage with other stakeholders in this process considering the local context.

III. SCALING UP AGROECOLOGY INITIATIVE

19. Agroecology embraces the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, contributing directly to multiple SDGs, *inter alia*: the eradication of poverty (1) and hunger (2); ensuring quality education (4); achieving gender equality (5); increasing water-use efficiency (6); promoting decent jobs (8); ensuring sustainable consumption and production (12); building climate resilience (13); and halting the loss of biodiversity (15).

20. The Initiative aims to accompany and support national agroecology transition processes through policy and technical capacity building on synergies between countries. It will build alliances among different stakeholders, strengthen networks and support co-creation of knowledge and knowledge sharing. The Initiative will develop, implement and continuously improve tools, instruments and guidance documents to support national agroecological transitions to achieve the SDGs. The transitions will be address at different levels ranging from best practices to strengthening an enabling environment.

21. Transitions require innovations in policies, rural institutions and partnerships, as well as in the production, processing, marketing, distribution and consumption of nutritious food, leading to

⁵ Family farmers are considered in a range from smallholder to medium-scale farmers, and include peasants, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, fisher folks, mountain farmers, pastoralists and many other groups representing every region and biome of the world. They run diversified agricultural systems and preserve traditional food products, contributing both to a balanced diet and the safeguarding of the world’s agro-biodiversity (FAO Family Farming Knowledge Platform, 2018).

sustainability and equity throughout the entire food and agricultural system. Scaling up agroecology requires overcoming key challenges while harnessing emerging opportunities. Bearing in mind that such transitions are long-term processes they should start without any further delay.

22. The Initiative will focus its efforts on three areas of work:

Area of Work 1. Knowledge and innovation for sustainable food and agricultural systems. The Initiative will support local and national efforts to deliver solutions for context-specific needs by generating and co-creating knowledge and conducting capacity-building and training activities. It will strengthen field-based capacity to sustainably manage agro-ecosystems across entire landscapes and seascapes by supporting food producers' organizations, extension agents and inter-disciplinary researchers helping countries achieve food security. It will also enable knowledge sharing across countries and regions that require new solutions to changing climates. The Initiative will demonstrate the impact of agroecology by expanding the evidence base, exploring research gaps and supporting data collection at national level.

Area of Work 2. Policy processes for transformation of food and agricultural systems. The Initiative will assist countries in the development of policies for agroecology with the participation of non-state actors. It will provide technical support to countries and seek to harness existing international instruments and decisions of inter-governmental bodies, including the 2030 Agenda, to support agroecological transition. It will catalyse cooperation throughout the UN system to strengthen agencies' capacities to support agroecological transition processes.

Area of Work 3. Building connections for transformative change. The Initiative will work with all stakeholders – governments, producers' organizations, consumers, civil society, research and the private sector – and support networks and platforms for knowledge exchange and dialogue at national, regional and international levels. It will ensure collaboration and coordination among UN agencies.

23. Harnessing the potential of agroecology requires a framework for coordinated action and collaboration among a range of actors. The Initiative responds to this need.

24. The Initiative will build on existing experiences and strengths. It will build on the outcomes of international and regional symposia on agroecology⁶ as well as activities implemented at national, regional and international levels. The Initiative will also respond to Member States' request to "*continue to strengthen ...work on agroecology*"⁷. It will capitalize and bring together the work and efforts of the many partners and stakeholders who have been actively involved in agroecology and build a new, forward-looking framework for action.

25. The Initiative will act at national, regional and global levels. National experiences with agroecology will be shared at regional and global level. As an increasing number of countries (as well as states and municipalities) are showing strong interest in agroecology and request support from inter-governmental bodies to guide transition processes, the Initiative will focus on countries requesting such support.

26. The Initiative also represents an opportunity for UN partners and related bodies (FAO, IFAD, WFP, CBD, UN Environment, UNDP and WHO) to work in a coordinated way to scale up agroecology through policies, science, investment, technical support and awareness, according to their mandate and expertise, and extending the knowledge to all actors.

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/global-dialogue/en/>

⁷ *Report of the 40th Session of the FAO Conference.* <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mu208e.pdf>

27. FAO and IFAD can join efforts within the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 as an opportunity to raise awareness in the international community about the importance of family farming and to link it with agroecology in achieving sustainable development.

28. The United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025 is as an opportunity to raise awareness in the international community about the importance of family farming and agroecology for achieving health and nutrition for all. FAO and WHO can collaborate in this regard.

IV. KEY MESSAGES AND WAY FORWARD

29. The FAO multi-stakeholder seminars along with the scientific data and field-level experiences collected in recent years have provided substantial evidence that agroecological approaches can significantly contribute to improve the sustainability of agriculture - including crop and livestock production, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry - and food systems. They highlighted relevant gaps and key challenges to scale up agroecology.

30. Given the gaps and challenges, political commitments are needed, along with reinforcements in the formulation of policies and elaboration of effective instruments at national levels, to accelerate an integral transformation of food production models that are consistent and coherent with each other, to achieve sustainable agriculture and food systems and the SDGs.

31. In this regard, FAO's role has been highlighted as a catalyst for evidence and knowledge sharing, for the provision of political and technical support along with normative frameworks, and for reaching agreements on a consistent approach between the different sectors at all levels, which are all critical elements to move forward with sustainable agroecological transitions.

32. Member States have requested FAO to pursue its mandate to reinforce its work on agroecology through the different strategic programmes and to "*continue to strengthen its normative and science and evidence-based work with particular attention to agroecology*" (C 2017/REP).

33. Local level implementation is a key feature of successful agroecological transitions. FAO Members are encouraged to work with FAO in developing policy and legal frameworks to promote and support agroecology to achieve sustainable food systems. In particular, FAO and governments can work together to: (i) increase training and research on agroecology, consolidating the evidence base and statistical data on the impacts of agroecology with the involvement of agricultural producers; (ii) develop collaborative platforms to connect relevant actors and enable the co-creation of knowledge; (iii) extend the research agenda to the cost effective and massive transfer of knowledge to millions of family farmers on agroecology; (iv) support networking among innovative agroecological farms that involve collaboration between farmers and researchers.

34. The "Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative" launched at the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology is an important instrument through which agroecology can be mainstreamed within FAO's programme of work, and at international, regional and national levels in cooperation with major UN partners and other stakeholders.

35. A 10 Year Action Plan for the Initiative will be submitted to the upcoming 26th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) for consideration. The Action Plan will build upon the recommendations and agreements arising from the international and regional meetings.

36. FAO Members are encouraged to take note of the outcomes of the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology and support the endorsement of the Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative by FAO governing bodies, in order to mainstream agroecological approaches within FAO's programme of work and ensure an efficient and coherent implementation of the Initiative for the achievement of the SDGs.