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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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Agriculture and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will shape development policies between now and 2030. The Agenda integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, environment and social. By design, it calls upon member states and their partners to explore the linkages across goals and targets.

Food and agriculture lie at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda. Implementing sustainable agriculture is central to the achievement of many SDGs, and it is therefore important to strengthen the engagement of the sector in national development strategies.

Past developments in agriculture have led to major improvements in productivity and to the ability to satisfy growing demands for food and other bio-based products. However, progress has been uneven and has often come with social and/or environmental costs that undermine success and threaten sustainability. Future improvements in agriculture will continue to rely on enhanced productivity, but greater emphasis will be needed on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

For achieving the SDGs, a new approach is needed, that integrates agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and that takes into account trade-offs and synergies across sectors and across sustainability dimensions. FAO has recently developed the elements of a framework and approach to address sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a more effective and integrated way. This approach helps to support the necessary policy dialogues and governance arrangements and to identify sustainable development pathways across the SDGs, across the sectors and along related value chains, in line with the principles and approaches underpinning the 2030 Agenda.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to :

- 1) Consider the key role agriculture can play in achieving the SDGs and opportunities to reflect this in national development strategies. In particular, take note of the need to promote actions

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that balance the three dimensions of sustainability and that are more integrated across agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

- 2) Endorse the five elements developed by FAO as a basis for the policy dialogue and governance arrangements needed to identify sustainable development pathways across the SDGs, across sectors and along related value chains.
- 3) Provide guidance on how to promote the integrated approach towards achieving the SDGs presented in this paper.

The Committee may also wish to invite the other FAO Technical Committees to continue enhancing collaboration and coordination towards a stronger and more effective contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to the 2030 Agenda.

Substantial queries on this document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. In September 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted a new global framework for development: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The new agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹ and 169 targets, which are to be achieved by 2030. The 2030 Agenda will have an impact on all aspects of development, with major implications for food and agriculture.
2. This paper examines the opportunities that the 2030 Agenda offers to agriculture, and analyses the key role food and agriculture will play in achieving the SDGs. It discusses the actions that are needed to lead change towards sustainable food and agriculture, and the efforts needed to develop a more coherent and integrated response across crop, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture production systems.
3. The paper discusses the ongoing efforts by FAO to develop tools and approaches to help the transition towards sustainable food and agriculture, ensuring coherent response across agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and seeks guidance from the Committee on how FAO can further strengthen its assistance to countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

II. A transformative agenda for sustainable development

4. The 2030 Agenda is universal, with perspectives and responsibilities that reflect priorities and needs of all countries. The SDGs aim at eradicating all forms of hunger and poverty and make a commitment for truly sustainable and inclusive development and an effective response to climate change.
5. The SDGs introduce a new vision of development based on programmes and policies that are integrative and holistic, thus enabling more innovative development strategies. The SDGs integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environment and social), with closely interwoven goals and targets, and demand comprehensive, evidence-based and participatory approaches to problem-solving and policy-making. By design, the 2030 Agenda calls upon member states and their partners to explore the many linkages across goals and targets. It challenges them to develop technically sound policies and programmes adapted to this ambitious and complex vision.
6. As the outcome of the largest multi-stakeholder consultation in history, the SDGs enjoy strong country ownership and commitment for their implementation.
7. Countries will establish national responses to the overall implementation of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda based on national needs, stage of development and capacities, resources, strategies and partnerships. Partnerships will be the key means for mobilizing the needed “means of implementation”.

III. Food and agriculture – key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals²

8. Food and agriculture lie at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda. In addition to meeting humanity’s needs for food, feed, fibre and other products, agriculture, forestry and fisheries employ one in three of the world’s workers, provide livelihood for rural households totalling 2.5 billion people, and are the sectors that most impact the way land, water, biodiversity and genetic resources are managed. Implementing sustainable crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture

¹ See Annex I

² When not specified otherwise, ‘agriculture’ is understood here as the whole set of activities related to crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture.

is therefore central to achieving many of the SDGs. It will directly affect the success of SDG 1 (end extreme poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture); SDG 3 (health); SDG 6 (water); SDG 13 (climate action); SDG 14 (marine ecosystems) and SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems, forests and land). It will influence the outcome of several other goals and targets related to employment, gender equality, access to resources, responsible consumption and production; and the achievement of SDG 16 on peace and inclusive societies, and SDG 17 on partnering for sustainable development.

9. The SDGs present a unique opportunity for a stronger role of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in shaping sustainable development. For this to happen, leaders at national level are expected to look at the role of agriculture in a new way. A key challenge is to strengthen the effective engagement of these sectors at the highest-level of decision-making on national development strategies to demonstrate that agriculture, forestry and fisheries are major contributors to achieving national and global goals and targets. The need for investment in these sectors should also be recognized as a priority for national development. In this regard, the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems provide guidance on how to promote responsible investment that contributes to food security and sustainable development.

10. Many global agreements exist that support specific elements of the 2030 Agenda. The Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change reinforces Member States' commitment to a transformative process that addresses a range of SDGs, recognizing that climate change and sustainable development are inextricably linked. Under the Paris Agreement, parties commit to preparing and communicating "nationally determined contributions" in relation to climate change. The agriculture sector features prominently in the intended nationally determined contributions transmitted ahead of the Paris Conference. Ninety-four percent of the countries included agriculture, forestry and land use in their mitigation and/or adaptation contributions.

11. The SDGs also place renewed emphasis on biodiversity and have partially incorporated the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), reinforcing the integration of the biodiversity agenda into the broader development agenda. The CBD programme of work on agricultural biodiversity and the mainstreaming of biodiversity in agriculture, fisheries and forestry are of direct relevance to sustainable agriculture.

12. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), adopted in July 2015, provides a framework for a new global partnership for sustainable development, with the aim of financing and accelerating development. Investments to address climate change are expected to play a strong role in financing actions in agriculture.

13. The ICN2 Framework for Action, adopted in November 2014, provides opportunities for sustainable transformation and contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to enhance nutrition sensitive food systems and to enable healthy diets.

IV. The way forward: leading change towards sustainable food and agriculture

14. Given the ambition and the major interlinkages between the SDGs, implementing the 2030 Agenda will require new modalities for developing coherent and effective policies, programmes and investments. The SDGs can effectively be achieved through partnerships, thus transforming the way different stakeholders cooperate.

15. Achieving the SDGs will require looking at sustainable development within and across agriculture, forestry and fisheries in an integrated manner, taking into account synergies and trade-offs across sectors and across sustainability dimensions. Development assistance will need to evolve, with less emphasis on joint projects and more attention on policy advice, human and institutional capacity development and monitoring of progress.

Ensuring effective actions towards sustainable agriculture

16. Past development efforts in agriculture have led to major improvements in productivity, making it possible to feed a growing global population with relatively limited expansion of agricultural land. However, progress has not been the same everywhere and has often been accompanied by social and/or environmental costs that undermined the positive impacts and threatened sustainability. Future improvements in agriculture will continue to rely on enhanced productivity, but greater emphasis will need to be placed on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

17. Solutions exist for the progressive development of more sustainable and productive agriculture. Research and innovation provide technical ingredients for change, and better understanding of ecosystem functions and services. Technologies and approaches exist for improving soil health and enhancing carbon sequestration, more efficient use of water and energy, efficient food supply chains, the reduction of food loss and waste, and the conservation of biodiversity. Work in agroecology also offers elements of response. There are various solutions for the production of healthier and more nutritious food, which need greater attention and should be promoted.

18. Greater understanding of the social dimensions of sustainable agriculture—including the need to pay particular attention to the situations and roles of women, youth, smallholders and family farmers, fisher folks, pastoralists, forest users and indigenous peoples—is key in determining a successful transition to sustainable agriculture practices. Against this background, innovations that can contribute to a more sustainable economy have considerable potential for employment creation in rural areas, in particular for young women and men. This directly contributes to Goal 8 of the SDGs on productive employment and decent work for all.

19. It is also vital to engage these important social actors in the design and implementation of policies, programmes and investments to promote the adoption of innovative and new practices and ensure access to appropriate technologies. They need to be empowered as critical agents of change through smart incentives and sustained policy dialogue.

20. Decision-making requires a clear understanding of the synergies and trade-offs that exist across and within the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Choices often need to be made between conservation and production options; short- and long-term needs; economic benefits and environmental externalities; and among agricultural development models that have different impacts on productivity, food security, equity and rural poverty in various ways. Sustainability requires enhancing synergies and identifying ways to build upon them as well as to manage trade-offs.

Ensuring coherent actions across agriculture, forestry and fisheries

21. Taken independently, sectoral approaches can lead to conflicts in resource use and their sub-optimal allocation and management. In many places, crops, livestock and inland aquaculture compete for land and water, and their expansion is usually at the expense of forests and inland fisheries, thus resulting in erosion of biodiversity and increased emissions of carbon dioxide. The expanding demand for animal products has led to increasing demand for animal feed that requires more land. Similarly, the culture of high-value aquatic carnivorous species has increased the demand for fish feed, which adds to the already high pressure on wild fish stocks. These are only a few examples of the complex inter-sectoral interactions that can no longer be ignored.

22. On the other side, important synergies and complementarities can be explored between crops, livestock, trees, fisheries and aquaculture, supported by natural or semi-natural ecosystems that contribute to soil formation, water purification, biodiversity conservation and climate regulation. Integrated approaches require knowing where there is potential and promoting political processes that nurture an equitable distribution of costs and benefits across different stakeholders, and over time. It

also requires innovative technologies, interventions and institutions that are geared to capturing these synergies.

A new way of working together

23. Effective transition towards sustainable development requires a common understanding and better dialogue within and across sectors. It also entails involving all stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, academia and research institutions, and developing partnerships at different levels. Achieving progress on the SDGs makes it necessary to align and enhance investments in agriculture and to prioritize those actions that can achieve measurable results on the ground.

Key elements of governing transformation towards sustainable food and agriculture in the framework of the 2030 Agenda
1) Country ownership and leadership
2) Cross-sector, integrated approaches and policy coherence
3) Multi-stakeholder approaches and partnerships
4) Alignment of investments, public and private
5) Focus on actions with measurable results

Towards a common approach in support of sustainable food and agriculture

24. Shared goals and principles are a powerful entry point for discussion amongst different stakeholders on more coherent actions for implementing the 2030 Agenda. FAO, as part of its own transformative change process, has developed a framework and an approach to address sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a more effective and integrated way³. This work builds on FAO's experience in sustainable production of crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and management of land, water, oceans and coasts and soils, biodiversity, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation.

25. It considers the following five elements as a basis for the policy dialogue and governance arrangements needed to identify sustainable development pathways across the SDGs, across sectors and along related value chains:

- 1) **Improving efficiency in the use of resources.** This includes improved genetic material, improved agricultural technologies and practices, integrated management of pests and soil fertility, precision irrigation, improved animal feeding and health control, reduced loss and waste.
- 2) **Conserving, protecting and enhancing natural ecosystems.** This includes practices for the conservation of plant and animal genetic resources, restoration and conservation of soils, protection against water pollution, reduced carbon emission intensity, and incentives for environmental services, such as the protection of pollinators and carbon sequestration.
- 3) **Protecting and improving rural livelihoods, equity and social well-being.** Of critical importance is the extent to which rural people, in particular small-scale family farmers, youth and women, have secure and equitable access to knowledge, services, markets and resources, including land and water, control over their livelihood through decent work opportunities, and access to diverse and nutritious food.
- 4) **Enhancing the resilience of people, communities and ecosystems.** This includes contingency planning for droughts, floods or pest outbreaks and the adoption of more diversified and resilient production systems, associated with effective safety nets.

³ The document *Building a common vision for sustainable food and agriculture – principles and approaches* – has been produced as a basis for discussion and dialogue on the way forward (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3940e.pdf>)

- 5) **Promoting responsible and effective governance mechanisms across natural and human systems.** This includes effective policies and strategies that are consistent across sectors, alignment of legal frameworks and investments, and strengthening of capacities of public institutions and other relevant stakeholders at all levels. It is based on broad stakeholder consultation, strengthening partnerships, and the application of mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms that are needed to build consensus around sustainable development objectives.

26. Building more effective and coherent policies and programmes requires an evidence-based assessment of issues and policy options related to these principles, inclusive dialogue platforms that lead to shared understanding and negotiated solutions across sectors and across the dimensions of sustainability, and the development of tools to transform these solutions into changes in practices.

V. Monitoring progress in implementing sustainable agriculture in the context of the 2030 Agenda

27. A follow-up and review mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is central to this new paradigm. This requires a solid framework of indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability. In March 2016, the UN Statistical Commission endorsed a global SDG indicator framework comprising 230 global indicators that all countries should report on. National statistical offices, with the support of their line agencies, and international organizations, are working together to further refine methodologies, data collection tools and to carry out statistical capacity development activities in the different monitoring domains.

28. Countries are now discussing ways of adapting global indicators to national circumstances, including by further disaggregating data at national and sub-national levels. Coordination between the international statistical community and country-based efforts will be key to ensuring relevant and consistent monitoring of progress at all levels. Additional investments will be required to facilitate innovations and improvements in national statistical systems and to strengthen national capacities.

VI. FAO's support to countries

29. As countries are preparing to implement the 2030 Agenda, FAO's support to member countries is being re-aligned. With its recently reviewed Strategic Framework, FAO is putting sustainability at the centre of its support to member countries, focusing attention on better collaboration across sectors and levels, and stronger involvement of stakeholders in partnerships, which is in line with the principles and approaches underpinning the 2030 Agenda.

30. In many regions, the development of knowledge, human and institutional capacity in agriculture, forestry and fisheries is key to implementing the SDGs. FAO's work in countries and regions provides technical evidence to support decision-making and capacity development strategies and programmes to address the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development.

31. Implementing the 2030 Agenda calls for extended partnership arrangements where governments, the private sector, academia and civil society jointly contribute to the common goals. Non-state actors at all levels have a role to play in supporting the SDGs in practical and measurable ways. FAO helps in achieving such interactions through support to partnership platforms for sustainable agriculture.

32. FAO also offers its members a neutral forum to review and negotiate instruments, standards and tools needed for the transition towards sustainable agriculture. FAO hosts more than 70 instruments and mechanisms on different aspects of sustainability across agricultural sectors.

33. In terms of SDG monitoring, FAO has been designated as "custodian agency" for 20 global indicators spanning six goals, and a major contributor to five other indicators. Many of these

indicators are new, and FAO is actively engaged in developing the most appropriate statistical methodologies needed to measure them. FAO is also assisting countries in meeting the new monitoring challenges through statistical capacity development: improving the skills of national statisticians, enhancing institutional coordination and testing new statistical tools.

34. FAO is also responsible for providing the storyline for the annual global SDG progress reports in relation to food and agriculture. FAO's global assessment reports and flagship publications will support the thematic reporting on SDG achievements.

VII. Points for consideration by the Committee

35. The achievement of the SDGs is closely associated with countries' capacity and engagement to address sustainable development in an integrated and coherent manner. In order to support this, FAO has, at technical level, developed a framework and an approach to mobilize action towards sustainable development across agriculture, forestry and fisheries in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. This overarching framework and the approach are submitted for consideration to FAO's Technical Committees in view of encouraging more effective and coherent action within and across these sectors in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

36. The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Consider the key role agriculture can play in achieving the SDGs and opportunities to reflect this in national development strategies. In particular, take note of the need to promote more integrated actions across agriculture, forestry and fisheries that balance the different dimensions of sustainability.
- 2) Endorse the five elements developed by FAO as a basis for the policy dialogue and governance arrangements needed to identify sustainable development pathways across the SDGs, across sectors and along related value chains.
- 3) Provide guidance on how to promote the integrated approach towards achieving the SDGs presented in this paper.

37. The Committee may also wish to invite the other FAO Technical Committees to continue enhancing collaboration and coordination towards a stronger and more effective contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to the 2030 Agenda.

Annex I: The Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Global Sustainable Development.