African Regional Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors

4–5 November 2019, Kigali, Rwanda

Executive summary and recommendations
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Farmers harvesting hay, Africa, Tera, Niger

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A vendor bags tomatoes for a customer at the Luwowsoshi market in Lubumbashi, Katanga province, Democratic Republic of Congo

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Women of the Boula-Ngara village working in the onion patch of the market garden, Mao, Chad

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FAO Projects in Afar, Ethiopia. FAO Projects contributing to End Hunger in Africa

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Farmers checking the growth of cabbage plants in a farmer field school, Thiaye
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Biodiversity is critical for safeguarding global food security, underpinning healthy and nutritious diets, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of people and communities. The recent alarming findings on the threats of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO)'s *The State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* and the global assessment report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services have put agricultural sectors at the center of the debate in sustaining the future of human well-being and livability of the planet.

Against this background, the FAO Conference, in 2017, welcomed FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform (the Platform) and requested FAO to facilitate, in collaboration with its partners, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other UN organizations, the integration in a structured and coherent manner of actions for the conservation, sustainable use, management and restoration of biological diversity across agricultural sectors at national, regional and international levels.

FAO, working with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) co-organized the first global multi-stakeholder dialogue on biodiversity mainstreaming in Rome (May 2018) and four regional dialogues for Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico, October 2018), Asia and the Pacific (Thailand, July 2019), the Near East (Jordan, November 2019), and Africa (Rwanda, November 2019).

The African Regional Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors (including crops and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) took place from 4 to 5 November 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda, hosted by the Government of Rwanda and co-organized by FAO with the Convention on Biological Diversity. There were over 80 participants representing 27 African countries, including the Ministers of Agriculture from Rwanda and South Sudan, Representatives from the African Union Commission (AUC), UN Agencies, other international and regional organizations, research institutes including CGIAR centers, and civil society organizations including farmers associations and youth groups.

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Biodiversity in Africa

Africa represents 25 per cent of the global biodiversity which is alarmingly under pressure. The Africa Region depends on the extraordinary rich biodiversity at all levels (genetic, species and ecosystems), as well as a wealth of traditional knowledge of the continent that can play a key role in promoting resilience of production systems, improving livelihoods and supporting food security and nutrition. However, the true value of nature’s contributions to human well-being (as in other regions) is still under-appreciated in decision-making processes. Africa’s current population of 1.25 billion is likely to double by 2050 and will put severe pressure on the continent’s biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people, unless appropriate policies, investments and strategies are adopted and effectively implemented in a context where Africa is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
Main objectives

The main objectives of the African Regional Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors, in line with regional objectives and priorities, including the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, aimed at the following:

- To raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors, including the newly approved FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors, and to exchange knowledge, experiences and lessons learned on biodiversity mainstreaming in countries within the region, fostering mutual learning among different stakeholders;

- To identify the roles of different stakeholders including youth and women in mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors and to identify gaps, needs and priorities, creating synergies in the Region towards sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity, and reaching consensus on actions to be taken at regional and country levels;

- To realize a consultation on the draft FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors and to propose actions that can be taken at regional and country level;

- To contribute to the discussion of the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Highly participatory and vibrant dialogues characterized the two-day event, highlighting the main biodiversity challenges in Africa. These included land conversion, deforestation, encroachment, unsustainable land and agriculture practices, climate change, drought and water scarcity, conflicts, land tenure insecurity, inadequate investments for biodiversity-friendly practices, lack of integrated planning for local level implementation, lack of access to markets, weak enabling environment for cross-sectoral collaboration among different ministries.

The good news is that there are new opportunities to bring biodiversity actions at the fore of the global, regional, national and local level awareness. At the global level, the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), the UN Decade on Family Farming (2018–2029) and FAO’s Biodiversity Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across agricultural sectors are highly relevant opportunities and spaces for agricultural sectors to be engaged and ensure that biodiversity is mainstreamed across agricultural, environment, finance, cultural and other sectors. FAO global biodiversity-related instruments such as the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources provide additional tools and entry points for regional and national actions. At the regional level, there are existing initiatives and/or platforms to build upon, such as the Africa’s Great Green Wall, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), The AU Sustainable Forest Management Framework, the AU strategy on combating illicit exploitation of fauna and flora, the Africa Youth Ambassadors, AU Eco-Agriculture Initiative, the Pan African Agenda on Ecosystem Restoration for Increased Resilience, the FAO regional statutory and governance bodies such as the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission and the African Regional Conference, among others. In some countries, national and local level participatory approaches such as platforms or mechanisms are also in place.

Biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices, which are very familiar to most stakeholders of the Africa Region, should not be difficult for scaling up and adoption. There are interesting innovations with youth playing significant roles in many global, regional and national projects and programmes that make them the ‘agents of change’ in an interconnected world through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and other type of technologies in agriculture. There are on-going inclusive national training initiatives for agri-business and entrepreneurships with a special focus on women and youth in many African countries that are boosting job creations and vibrant opportunities.

Despite several positive developments that support biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in Africa, there are still great challenges faced because the true value of biodiversity contributions to human well-being is still underappreciated, particularly in decision-making processes and investments. Biodiversity is still often taken for granted. Fast-paced economic development and rapid urbanization and population growth in the region are major threats to the extraordinary rich biodiversity of Africa that is continuing to be depleted. The economic growth model can no longer be sustained since the earth’s carrying capacity can no longer meet the demands of the growing population and urbanization in the region.

Participants of the Regional Dialogue agreed to put forward the following recommendations to the global and regional inter-governmental institutions, donors and national governments, and to FAO specifically:

1. **Awareness raising and identifying “country champions” on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors.**

   Participants called for a “paradigm shift” of agriculture and food systems taking into account the urgent need for all stakeholders to ensure that biodiversity is mainstreamed in agricultural sectors. The call for a “paradigm shift” of the agriculture and food systems would require the following actions:

   • Connecting biodiversity conservation and sustainable use with food security and nutrition, neglected crops species, human health, climate resilience, among others;

   • Recognizing and fostering the conservation of neglected and traditional crops and breeds, practices increasing the provision of ecosystem services such as pollination, among others;

   • Enabling biodiversity-friendly conscious decision making along biodiversity-based products and ecosystem services value chains;

   • Decision-makers, governments and investors considering the true value of biodiversity contributions to human well-being and ecosystems services and in return investing proactively in its conservation and sustainable use;

   • Identification of Champion countries that will promote the institutionalization of biodiversity-friendly interventions, policies and investments and serve as examples for others.

2. **Research, documentation and development of new tools for Biodiversity-Friendly Agriculture Business Case Models.**

   The lack of evidence-based information should be given a priority. Traditional practices are often not acknowledged and there is a need to bring together science and traditional knowledge. Some African countries started to capture the value of biodiversity-friendly practices through natural capital accounting, paving the way for new policies and incentive schemes. Participants recommended:

   • There is a need to build the business case for agricultural sectors that are biodiversity-friendly and viable.

   • The stocktaking exercise of documenting and exchanging (accessible and cost-effective) good practices can provide good insights for replication and scaling up, and more importantly can be used as support to policy instruments on biodiversity mainstreaming in agricultural sectors.
3. Knowledge and information sharing that allow to create synergies towards the re-design of a new agriculture and food systems. It should be coordinated coherently across the Africa region, be shared at the national level and trickled down to community levels. Participants recommended to FAO:

- The development of a searchable, web-based database of policies, tools, guidance and business cases for sustainable use, conservation and valuation of biodiversity;

- The development of a participatory regional web-based discussion forum and information sharing mechanism (new tools, success stories and failures, events, funding opportunities);

4. Multi-stakeholder national platforms for networking, alliances and partnerships on biodiversity sustainable use and conservation should be strengthened and institutionalized. Participants recommended:

- Upon request by governments, FAO country offices would act as facilitators for national biodiversity dialogues across sectors of agriculture (including crops and livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, environment, planning, finance, education, culture, among others). This should be applied from national to local levels that build and strengthen alliances among women, youth, farmers, pastoralists, forest users and producers, traditional leaders, private sector, academia, research, etc.

5. Capacity development including through training, especially targeting youth and women that constitute 60 per cent of the population, enabling them to work with their communities with technical and financial tools. Participants recommended:

- Capturing the fresh graduates who would like to give back to their communities by giving them start-up kits and training for biodiversity social entrepreneurship in agricultural sectors;

- Supporting producers, especially youth and women, with new models of vocational training (away from traditional classroom models).

- Developing education programmes on biodiversity values, conservation and sustainable use, across different learning curriculum, formal and informal education.

6. Strengthening integrated ecosystem approaches for uptake by governments. Participants recommended:

- Scaling up existing successful projects and experiences into larger programmes, such as national initiatives on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, sustainable forest management, landscape restoration, conservation agriculture, agroecology, agroforestry, in-situ and ex-situ conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture, pollinators, preservation of heritage and traditional agricultural practices and sites such as GIAHS.
7. **Strengthening enabling laws, regulations and policy frameworks.**

The national implementation of already ratified biodiversity-related global treaties and protocols remains a challenge. Few countries exemplify the enactment of laws and policies that are directly related to biodiversity. Insecure land tenure remains a major challenge in Africa. **Youth was recognized as an “agent of change”** in agricultural sectors. Therefore, there is a need to make agricultural sectors attractive for youth, through creating attractive livelihoods in rural areas and reducing the drudgery of work. Participants recommended:

- Giving women and youth the opportunity to become leaders and to express their voices in policy fora;
- Investing in rural development and diverse markets, and work-saving technologies such as ICTs, mechanized agriculture and other innovative mechanisms.

8. **The involvement of the private sector in biodiversity financing** remains a gap that needs to be filled. Participants recommended:

- Considering and developing innovative funding models for biodiversity friendly investment opportunities, such as blended financing, public-private partnerships and private sector initiatives;

Way forward

1. Participants agreed to provide their comments to this initial draft of recommendations with a turnaround of a one week response.

2. FAO will finalize the executive summary and recommendations and share them to all FAO country offices in Africa, for their forwarding to relevant ministries.

3. FAO, based on the recommendations, through the Platform will continue to prepare regional priority actions for the development of the Action Plan for the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

4. FAO will develop a monitoring plan to follow-up the implementation of recommendations directed at FAO and subsequent country as well as regional requests to FAO that are within the outcomes of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity.
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