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Outcomes of the Regional Meeting on Agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean

Executive Summary

- In a scenario of climate change and a world population forecast to grow to 9 billion by 2050, the objective of producing nutritious food in a sustainable manner becomes more challenging. Agroecology is one pathway to achieve this goal. In particular, family farming and agroecology are strongly connected in achieving sustainable food and nutrition security on the ground.
- Seeking to gain better understanding of the role that agroecology can play in achieving an end to hunger and malnutrition, FAO organized the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition¹ in September 2014 in Rome, Italy. The Symposium brought together 400 scientists, policy makers, farmers' organizations, the private sector and NGO representatives.
- Following the recommendations of the International Agroecology Symposium, three regional meetings were organized during 2015, in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to facilitate a dialogue about agroecology, its benefits, challenges and opportunities focusing on regional and national levels.
- The outcomes of the international and regional meetings highlighted the key role that agroecology can play in facilitating the transition to more productive, sustainable and inclusive food systems. The Regional Conference is invited to take into account the outcomes and recommendations of the Regional Seminar on Agroecology in Latin America and

¹ The final report of the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>

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Caribbean held in Brasilia, Brazil, on 24-26 June 2015, as detailed in Annex 1 of this Information Note.

I. Background

1. The global food system is at a crossroads as the new Sustainable Development Goals state that agriculture must contribute to ending hunger and malnutrition in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. Within this challenging context, agroecological food systems are capable of providing multiple benefits by enhancing food security and nutrition, restoring and maintaining healthy ecosystems, delivering sustainable livelihoods to family farmers² and building resilience to adapt to climate change. Agroecology offers principles and processes that need to be adapted locally.
2. Seeking to gain better understanding of the role that agroecology can play in achieving an end to hunger and malnutrition, FAO organized the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition³ in September 2014 in Rome, Italy. The Symposium brought together 400 scientists, policy makers, farmers' organizations, the private sector and NGO representatives.
3. Following the recommendations of the International Agroecology Symposium, FAO organized three regional meetings during 2015 in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to facilitate a dialogue about agroecology, its benefits, challenges and opportunities focusing on regional and national levels. This reflects the principle that effective work on agroecology must be based on regional and local realities as well as economic, social and environmental conditions.
4. The first FAO regional meeting on Agroecology was successfully held in Latin America and the Caribbean⁴ on 24-26 June 2015, in Brasilia, Brazil with over 130 participants from governments, civil society, regional organizations, academia and research institutions from 14 countries.
5. A regional meeting on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa was successfully held in Dakar, Senegal⁵ on 5-6 November 2015, with almost 300 participants from governments, research, civil society and the private sector. The event showcased already on-going activities and programs on agroecology as well as its immense potential to ensure food and nutrition security and environmental, economic and social sustainability in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, a multi-stakeholder consultation on agroecology for Asia and the Pacific⁶ was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 24-26 November 2015 with 140 participants.
6. In all these efforts, FAO functioned as a facilitator to enable fruitful debates and foster collaboration among a variety of actors in order to advance science, knowledge, public policies, programs and experiences on agroecology and enhance food security and nutrition at regional and national levels. FAO is supporting the strengthening of the already extensive evidence-based knowledge for agroecological approaches in agriculture. The Proceedings of the FAO International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition⁷ provide a first and important step in this direction. It will be important to continue to strengthen the dissemination of evidence-based

² The concept of family farming used in the present document aligns with the definition included in the FAO Medium-term Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Family Farming in Latin America and the Caribbean 2012-2015, which has by definition the equal inclusion of both genders. When addressing family farmers in this document, both genders are being considered.

³ The final report of the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>

⁴ For further information please see: www.fao.org/americas/eventos/ver/en/c/287503/

⁵ For further information please see <http://www.fao.org/africa/events/detail-events/en/c/330741/>

⁶ For further information please see (www.fao.org/asiapacific/events/detail-events/en/c/1262/)

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4729e.pdf>

knowledge and experiences in support of agroecology for food and nutrition security, especially to address some of the key questions identified at the International Symposium.

II. The role of Agroecology in the world and in Latin America and the Caribbean

7. In a scenario of climate change and a world population forecast to grow to 9 billion by 2050, the objective of producing healthy and nutritious food in a sustainable manner becomes even more challenging. There is a need to shift to more sustainable food systems, producing more with less social, economic and environmental costs. Agroecology is one pathway to achieve this goal.

8. Based on the international and regional meetings facilitated by FAO and the knowledge shared and created through these, participants agreed on agroecology's main benefits, challenges and opportunities, as described below.

9. "Agroecology is the integrative study of the ecology of the entire food system, encompassing ecological, economic and social dimensions"⁸. It is an important approach to move towards more sustainable food systems, whose practices, research and policies have seen exponential growth worldwide in the last decade.

10. Agroecology is based on the 3 pillars of sustainable development, within FAO's common vision for sustainable food and agriculture. With an emphasis on economic, social and environmental sustainability, countries can increase their food production while protecting the environment and promoting social inclusion.

11. Agroecology plays an important role in promoting food security and guaranteeing the human right to adequate food. A review of 154 comparisons between agroecological and conventional practices indicates that agroecology can improve farm profitability and yield⁹. Agroecology can thus play a key role to ensure food security, improve equity and end poverty.

12. Agroecology ensures nutrition security and diversification of diets. Agro-ecological food systems stand out as being one of the main providers of high-quality nutritious and healthy food in a culturally appropriate way, promoting local food habits and traditional knowledge.

13. Agroecology can help mitigate the negative effects of climate change. By strengthening the potential of food systems to store fixed carbon and reduce the production of greenhouse gases, agroecology facilitates the human adaptation to a warming climate while building more resilient agricultural systems.

14. Family farming and agroecology are strongly connected in achieving sustainable food and nutrition security on the ground. Family farming, the practice which agroecology is based on, involves at least 500 million family farms worldwide¹⁰. Indigenous peoples, local communities and family farmers are the key holders of agroecological knowledge, being at the center of agroecological food systems. Agroecology can provide concrete solutions for governments to promote a shift towards sustainable food systems when the appropriate enabling environment is in place.

⁸ Francis, C., Lieblein, G., Gliessman, S., Breland, T.A., Creamer, N., Harwood, R., Salomonsson, L., Helenius, J., Rickerl, D., Salvador, R., Wiedenhoft, M., Simmons, S., Allen, P., Altieri, M., Flora, C. & Poincelot, R. 2003. Agroecology: The ecology of food systems. *J. Sustain. Agr.*, 22: 99–118.

⁹ D'Annolfo, Gemmill-Herren, Graeb Agroecological socio-economics: agroecology's contribution to farm incomes, labour and other socio-economic dimensions of food systems (2015)

¹⁰ Lowder, S.K., Scoet, J. and Singh, S. 2014. What do we really know about the number and distribution of farms and family farms worldwide? Background paper for The State of Food and Agriculture 2014 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/019/i3729e/i3729e.pdf>

15. Agroecology can create a territorial and social dynamic that creates opportunities for rural youth and values women's leadership in agriculture. Agroecology promotes practices that allows youth to carry forward the permanent regeneration of knowledge, values, vision and leadership, which are critical for moving towards more sustainable food systems. Likewise, agroecology recognizes the central role of women in providing the social bases for the evolution of sustainable food systems, by promoting gender-sensitive income security and empowerment.

16. Agroecology prevents environmental degradation and pollution. By minimizing the use of toxic or damaging substances into the environment, agroecology reduces agriculture's negative effects on the ecosystems, ensuring sustainable food production. Main environmental benefits include:

- Maintain the soil's ecological health by preventing its erosion while preserving and rebuilding fertility;
- Prevent surface water and groundwater pollution, allowing aquifers to be recharged and meet the water needs of the environment and the communities;
- Restore ecosystem services and promote biodiversity by preventing its loss.

17. Agroecology reduces food waste and losses. By relying mainly on resources within the agro-ecosystem and replacing external inputs with nutrient cycling, agroecology promotes integrated and resource-conserving farming systems. Furthermore, agroecology provides an opportunity to shorten the value chain and ensure reduction of food waste.

18. Agroecology provides local solutions based on local needs. By establishing strong linkages between local small-holder food producers, local economies and markets, agroecology keeps farmers in the field with improved livelihoods. Agroecology combines local traditional practices with scientific knowledge and innovative technologies enabling adaptive local agricultural systems and context-specific solutions.

19. An enabling policy environment is key in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. Indigenous peoples, local communities and family farmers can overcome hunger and malnutrition while building resilience to adapt to climate change in a sustainable way through agro-ecological food systems supported by conducive policies, adequate legislation, investment, knowledge sharing, research and innovation.

20. The Latin America and the Caribbean region is at the forefront of the global fight against hunger, having made very important progress in reducing the proportion and total number of people suffering from hunger in the past 20 years. This has been achieved through a variety of approaches of which family farming, social protection and agroecology are amongst the most prominent ones. Thanks to successful public policies implemented by governments in the region coupled with economic growth, hunger fell from 14.7% in 1990-93 to 7.9% in 2010-2013. Child malnutrition has also been halved in the same period, while the total number of undernourished people decreased from 59 million in 1990 to 47 million in 2013.

21. In Latin America and the Caribbean, agroecology has been practiced for decades by social movements of smallholder family farmers, rural groups, traditional communities, indigenous peoples, artisanal fisher folks, herders, and gatherers. It has a strong scientific base and is increasingly receiving support from governments through new public policies. The practices and elements of agroecology contribute to ensuring food and nutrition security and sovereignty, while strengthening family farming and enabling social and environmental well-being.

22. Recently, agroecology was included in the regional agenda for integration, especially within Mercosur and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). The XX Specialized Meeting on Family Farming of MERCOSUR (Caracas, Venezuela, December 2013) incorporated agroecology into the agenda of the Thematic Groups on Adaptation to Climate Change and Climate Risk Management¹¹. Furthermore, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Family Farming and Rural

¹¹ <http://www.reafmercosul.org/index.php/acerca-de/biblioteca/actas/item/53-acta-xx-reaf>

Development of CELAC and the Ministerial Declaration of CELAC on family farming - adopted in Brasilia, Brazil in November 2014 and ratified at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (San José, Costa Rica, January 2015), requested FAO's support to convene a second regional event on agroecology to promote the exchange of experiences and the promotion of sustainable development policies¹².

III. Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

23. Within the growing challenges of sustainable production and environmental degradation, agroecology can provide a positive contribution to the eradication of hunger and extreme poverty, and a means to facilitate the transition to more productive, sustainable and inclusive food systems. In this regard, FAO can continue to work with member countries to harness the benefits of agroecology, not just at the global level but especially at regional and local levels.

24. Understanding how different countries are working on this approach and how it contributes to end hunger and malnutrition, to face climate change, improve environmental health and increase social well-being can be very beneficial. In this regard, cooperation and exchanges between countries and regions, -especially through regional and South-South and triangular cooperation- can play a crucial role.

25. The Regional Conference is invited to take into account on the outcomes and recommendations of the Regional Seminar on Agroecology in Latin America and Caribbean held in Brasilia, Brasil, on 24-26 June 2015, as detailed in Annex 1. These recommendations provide a clear direction towards the achievement of the objectives identified within the Regional Initiatives and FAO Strategic Objectives, in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹² http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net/archivos/documentos/declaracion_espanol.pdf

Annex 1

Final Recommendations of the Regional Seminar on Agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean - 24-26 June 2015, Brasilia, Brazil

26. Agroecology in the region has been carried out in practice for decades; by social movements of small-holder farmers, rural groups, traditional communities, indigenous peoples, artisanal fisher folk, herders, and gatherers. It has a strong scientific base and is increasingly receiving support from governments through new public policies. The practices and elements of agroecology ensure food security and sovereignty, as well as strengthen family farming.
27. As a result of the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security, held in September 2014 by FAO within the framework of the International Year of Family Farming; the Regional Seminar on Agroecology in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Brazil from June 24th- 26th, 2015.
28. Within the framework of the Plan of Action 2015 of the ad hoc Working Group on Family Farming and Rural Development of CELAC and the Ministerial Declaration of CELAC on Family Farming, approved in November of 2014 in Brasilia, Brazil, and ratified in the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (San Jose, Costa Rica- January 2015); declared “support for the convening of a regional event on agroecology to encourage the exchange of experiences and to promote policies of sustainable development.”
29. Within the framework of REAF, in the XX Specialized Meeting on Family Farming of MERCOSUR (Caracas, Venezuela, December 2013), the theme of agroecology was incorporated into the agenda of the Working Group on Climate Change Adaption and Risk Management.
30. Taking into account the Declaration of Nyeleni-Mali on Agroecology created by the social movements of small-holder farmers, rural groups, traditional communities, indigenous peoples, artisanal fisher folk, herders, gatherers, and youth;
31. The participants of the seminar; from social movements, the academic sector, representatives of public entities of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and guests from other regions, gathered in this Seminar, call upon the governments of the region, along with CELAC, FAO, REAF/MERCOSUR, and other relevant intergovernmental and international organizations to:
- a) Promote public policies which boost agroecology and food sovereignty; defined, implemented and monitored with active participation of social movements and civil society groups, assuring the necessary budget for its implementation.
 - b) Formulate and implement legal frameworks and regulations which are favourable to agroecology, in order to achieve food sovereignty.
 - c) Assure the social role of land and water through agrarian reforms, land policies, and the guarantee of land rights of indigenous and native peoples and traditional communities.
 - d) Promote the production of healthy, adequate food as well as the food sovereignty of the region through agroecology; recognizing that those systems have a more sustainable approach to land, water and energy.
 - e) Recognize and value ancestral knowledge, traditions, local wisdom and cultural identities as a pillar of agroecology. Additionally, the public research institutions should respect and value the traditional knowledge, promoting a knowledge dialogue in their participatory research programs.
 - f) Foster territorial dynamics of social innovation and technology by creating and/or strengthening the pillars of agroecology and in institutions of an interdisciplinary and intersectoral nature; with capacity to articulate processes of education, research and learning.
 - g) Develop specific policies which promote the productive organization of women; supporting their agroecological initiatives, strengthening their abilities to overcome the obstacles that they face, the heavy workload, the decriminalization; recognizing their historic role in agroecology and food sovereignty.

- h) Recognize and encourage the active role of families and communities, including women and youth, as guardians of biodiversity; especially seeds and genetic resources. In addition, ensure that genetic resources are restored by public germplasm banks, together with social movements; connecting the discussion on food sovereignty with the discussion on seed protection.
- i) Create a regional network in Latin America (a shared platform between the governments and social movements) for the exchange of best practices and information regarding agroecology, which complements the dialogue between the academic sector, governments and social movements.
- j) Create mechanisms which enable the reciprocity of participatory guarantee systems among the countries of the Latin American region by promoting the link between the producer and consumer.
- k) Include agroecology as a permanent topic in the agenda of the working group on Family Farming and Rural Development of CELAC; expanding the participation of social movements and civil society and academic groups in the working group, with the support of FAO.
- l) Create a program of exchange for agroecology and seeds, based on the working group of Family Farming and Rural Development of CELAC.
- m) Recommend the creation of a specific working group in the REAF focused on agroecology and expanding the discussion on specific instances in which family farming includes agroecology.
- n) Create conditions which restrict the practice of monoculture, the use of agro chemicals, and the concentration of land; in order to foster the increase of agroecological production by rural small-holder farmers in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- o) Support initiatives of formal and informal education, such as rural agroecological schools; increasing the level of education in rural areas through professional training of rural youth.
- p) Recognize the multifunctional role that rural small-holder agroecology plays in preserving soils, water, biodiversity, as well as other ecological functions; guaranteeing environmental preservation in a socially inclusive and economically just manner.
- q) Ensure that the agroecological systems are more resilient to climate change and request that resources are set aside for the development of agroecology, as part of climate policies that guarantee food sovereignty for the people.
- r) Create mechanisms to promote South-South Cooperation regarding the topic of agroecology, in collaboration with FAO, REAF, and other international and sub-regional organizations.

We wish to thank the organizing committee of this event, especially the Alliance of the People for Food Sovereignty in Latin America and the Caribbean, the FAO, CELAC, REAF, and the government of Brazil for their efforts to hold this discussion and we appreciate the efforts of FAO in carrying out the regional seminar in Africa and Asia. We request that the participation of those from social movements, governments, and the academic sector in Latin America and the Caribbean is included.

We also applaud the initiative of CELAC in carrying out a second seminar on agroecology during the Bolivian pro tempore presidency, with support from FAO and REAF.

We would like to inform you that Nicaragua and Costa Rica intend to hold seminars in the region and ask for FAO's support.