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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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**Statement by the Spokesperson of the Scientific and Academic Committee**

Considering that,

1. We are facing times of great transformations, which bring constant challenges that impact food, nutrition, agriculture, the economy, the environment and regional food security as a whole, the formation of alliances and inter-institutional coordination is a key tool.
2. The world has suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic for over two years and is making efforts to adapt to a "new normal", as well as to technological, social, economic, environmental and political changes that directly impact food supply chains, well-being and the capacity for nutritious, sustainable and resilient diets in the region. These changes are also an important challenge for the development of clean production systems that promote food safety, the preservation of the environment, and respect for the cultural diversity of the region.
3. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is the world's richest region in terms of biodiversity and the main exporter of food on a global scale, but it also has the highest rate of deforestation and continues to be the region with the highest level of social inequality on the planet.
4. The agricultural sector is key, not only because of its generation of exportable raw materials and foreign currency, but also because of the capacity for linkages with the agribusiness sector on a national, regional and global scale. In this regard, it is necessary to promote technological transformations that generate added value, while promoting decent and inclusive employment with gender equity, aimed at protecting food security and sovereignty.
5. The availability of water, energy, arable land and essential ecosystem services varies among the countries of the region, and given the effects of climate change, the competition for their use is increasingly acute. Thus, it is necessary to develop mechanisms that support the implementation and monitoring of national and regional legal standards to ensure the equitable and sustainable use of resources.
6. Academia and the scientific sector seek to strengthen and transmit to organized civil society the scientific evidence that contributes to the democratization of science and technology for the benefit of communities, under a territorial approach, in order to promote integrated rural development, which contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

7. The Scientific and Academic Committee for LAC held a series of meetings facilitated by FAO to discuss the priority topics of interest for the Members of the region. In this regard, the Committee has prepared the following statement.

### **RI1: Transforming food systems towards healthy diets for all**

#### **Importance of nutrition education**

##### **Food and nutrition concerns**

8. Current challenges demand efficient and sustainable food systems that guarantee the quality and safety of food throughout the value chain. The overriding imperative is to ensure that the mechanisms for access and fair availability of food ensure the same safety standards for export and domestic consumption.

9. Since regional efforts should focus on achieving the SDGs' thrust, it is necessary that academic institutions, in coordination with public policy, contribute to establishing baseline mechanisms, methodologies and metrics for the sectors. In this regard, it is important to promote food and nutrition information, communication and education. It is also necessary to support the design of policies to promote food and nutrition and bring the farm closer to the table through initiatives such as the "*farm to fork*" strategy that promote the implementation of equitable and sustainable development models.

##### **Importance of food and nutrition education**

10. The promotion of laws, alliances and public and private strategies that regulate the quality and safety standards of the food produced, as well as increasing the availability of nutritious food, are of vital importance. Therefore, it is imperative to raise awareness through food and nutrition information and education aimed at the various actors that make up the food chain.

11. Policies to regulate food prices, especially of fruits and vegetables, are also necessary, together with incentives for small-scale family farming, in order to facilitate the availability of foods with high nutritional value. It is also important to promote tools such as food labelling to raise awareness about the risk of consuming low-quality products.

12. Academic institutions must actively support the implementation of these guidelines in a context of ethical work, gathering and sharing knowledge among producers, students, educators, decision-makers, businesspeople, families and society in general. These are complementary strategies aimed at generating healthy environments for infants, youth and workers in educational communities, by promoting healthy eating habits and behaviors based on the example of the leaders of the sector.

##### **Knowledge sharing**

13. The promotion of open communities of mutual learning, linking knowledge and development planning, is an effective mechanism for scientific knowledge to be integrated into all communities and for these to become multipliers of learning.

14. It is also important to promote the organization of and partnership among the main actors of the food chains to implement strategies aimed at the creation of centers of innovation and productive transformation with added value, thereby optimizing the use of agricultural and aquaculture by-products through a bioeconomy approach, based on agroecology, in order to reduce food loss and waste (FLW).

## **RI2: More prosperous and inclusive rural societies**

### **Focus on family farming to close the gaps**

15. There is a need to recognize the diversity of family farming, languages and knowledge, as well as the participation of women in the production chain, as this will contribute to the development and implementation of targeted subsistence strategies with an emphasis on the most vulnerable. In addition, academic institutions should adopt an integrated vision of food production systems, instead of a single sectoral view, while promoting the strengthening of family farmers and supporting their linkages with production chains, together with the promotion of fair trade.

### **Development of education, training, and research programmes, together with family farmers, with a focus on learning by doing**

16. The academic sector should strengthen participatory rural extension processes and develop applied research through a vision of the specific needs of the various types of family and community agricultural units, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable.

17. The promotion of production planning, and the adoption of an agroecology approach will allow for greater conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, as well as minimizing the use of agro-toxic products and promoting the respectful and efficient use of soil and water resources.

18. Policies should be prioritized that facilitate the protection of globally strategic ecosystems, such as the Orinoco, the Amazon and the Andean Paramos, among others.

### **The value of traditional knowledge in rural areas**

19. Recovering and highlighting the importance of ancestral knowledge, languages, medicines, practices, uses and customs will promote more inclusive societies with regulatory mechanisms that safeguard traditional knowledge and practices.

20. Protecting the biodiversity of each territory, while promoting the appellation of origin (“sacred medicine and ancient botany”), will generate economic compensation for the development of communities with this ancestral legacy.

21. Academic institutions play a significant role in the generation and dissemination of evidence that leads to the recognition of the importance of ancestral knowledge in order to address nutritional problems, challenges, consumption habits and lifestyles.

### **The problem of the aging rural population**

22. Research must be carried out to produce evidence to help raise awareness about the elderly, in the most remote and inaccessible areas of the region, as rural citizens with their own rights and duties.

23. It is important to consider retention strategies for the population that returned to rural areas during the pandemic, promoting the appreciation of cultural roots, land restitution and historical memory. In this regard, economic incentive programmes are necessary to retain youth and promote their return to rural areas.

### **The importance of collaborative, trans-disciplinary and holistic work in rural sectors, emphasizing the need for extension services**

24. The development of extension strategies that help stop the rural exodus, such as the promotion of training, innovation and technology in rural areas, the promotion and recognition of the participation of women in rural development and the family economy, as well as incentives for their inclusion in the production market, will help to promote integrated rural development in the territories.

### **Capacity building on trending topics**

25. It is important to promote the strengthening of capacities in the region in terms of the development of digital skills related to emerging issues, such as smart agriculture, which are adapted to the cultural characteristics of family farming. The development, promotion and use of information technologies, considering the advantages and disadvantages for each territory, will allow the adoption of modern technologies. It is also necessary to launch open-source alternatives and user-friendly and

efficient technologies to improve productivity through access to information for better decision-making by farmers in LAC.

### **RI3: Sustainable and resilient agriculture**

#### **Establishing a link between academia and decision-makers**

26. To improve the results of agriculture in the region, the interaction of academia with all actors in the food chain is necessary. Therefore, it is important to continue strengthening strategic initiatives, such as the Right to Food Watch (RFW)-LAC and the FAO/CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences) Special Group, among others, which are related to the objectives pursued in this statement. For example, the RFW "promotes the generation of studies, indicators and recommendations that can be very useful in the processes of development, implementation and control of legislation and/or public policies applied at the local, national or regional level." In turn, the mission of the FAO/CLACSO Special Group is to: "Coordinate and manage the generation of evidence, knowledge, dissemination and other necessary actions... Establish a bridge between the academic sector, decision-makers and other actors linked to public policies... Generate and coordinate training and extension actions aimed at improving the capacities of the actors linked to the design and execution of public policies in FNS."

27. These initiatives, together with the approach to decision-makers, such as the Parliamentary Fronts Against Hunger, will generate linkages aimed at creating general guidelines for the entire region in terms of food security and nutrition.

#### **Eradication of illegal fishing, strengthening of monitoring systems and capacities of small-scale producers, and integrated management of coastal zones**

28. Given that small-scale primary producers of food chains tend to rely on different subsistence strategies, it is necessary to strengthen their capacities for organization, partnership and formalization aimed at increasing their access to resources, means of production and co-financing, among others, allowing their greater participation in the production market. Generating evidence regarding the causes of behaviors that lead to illegal activities in rural areas is of vital importance.

#### **The loss of biodiversity in the region must prevent degradation and promote the restoration of ecosystems, while adequately prioritizing lands that need to be protected/restored.**

29. The development by academic institutions of regional research studies that are based on the use of good practices, in harmony with the communities where they are developed, and taking into account their ancestral customs, will help to minimize impacts on the environment. These institutions act as a knowledge generator for the creation of regulatory and harmonizing standards (such as ISO 14046, 14067 and 14069, etc.) that involve the management of resources, the restoration of ecosystems and their sustainable use.

#### **Financing for research and innovation**

30. The search for incentives to develop research and development capacity for the creation and strengthening of national science, technology and agricultural innovation strategic planning systems in the countries of the region will contribute to the development of the bioeconomy, agricultural innovation and modern technologies that guarantee the regional production of safe foods with high nutritional value and cultural acceptance.

#### **The use of holistic and systemic approaches is recommended for maintaining the health of land and water in productive sectors, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable populations**

31. Strengthening and implementing national and regional plans for nutritional care, through the use of holistic and systemic approaches with a view to ensuring a healthy diet for the entire population, and especially the most vulnerable, is an important goal that highlights the work of primary food producers, based on the conviction that "without farmland, there is no city". In this

context, access to clean water and basic sanitation is an ethical imperative that must be sought through resource management and ecosystem protection strategies.

32. Academic institutions share responsibility for the development, production and communication of information and knowledge within ethical, holistic and systemic parameters, protecting the most vulnerable and defending life in all its forms and spaces.

33. FAO is a strategic partner and the most important link to expand the influence of academic institutions and bring them closer to decision-makers. In this regard, the strengthening of national research centers for the development of basic and applied research on key issues for the region must be a top priority.

34. Finally, the creation of a regional academic-scientific network in charge of coordinating the issues agreed upon in this group, together with FAO and other public and private actors, is essential to achieve the objectives mentioned in this statement. In this regard, regional coordination and productive alliances for peace are of vital importance for the food and nutritional security of Latin America and the Caribbean.