HLPE Report on Agro-ecological and other Innovative Approaches to Sustainable Agriculture

Questions

What are the priority issues to be addressed during the CFS policy convergence process?

The HLPE report's examination of 'other innovative approaches' to sustainable agriculture besides agroecology is limited. Ultimately approaches to sustainable agriculture should be context-specific, and appropriate for the scale of the agricultural system, the available technology, skills and resourcing, as well as the biophysical, social and regulatory environment. Such approaches should also be based on scientific evidence, and for this reason Australia would support a clear definition of 'agroecology as a science and a set of agricultural practices'. Furthermore, Australia suggests that an increased focus on sustainable agriculture practices beyond agroecology is required.

For Australia it is important to present a balanced view of the various actions and pathways being taken by countries to transform towards, maintain and enhance sustainable agricultural systems. Agroecology is one of these options, along with other approaches such as conservation agriculture, climate smart agriculture and sustainable intensification. Consequently, Australia suggests that the report recommendations should be more in line with the language from Resolution 7/2019 (paragraph 9) on sustainable agricultural approaches adopted at the FAO Conference in 2019: 'Recognising that agroecology is one approach, among others, to contribute to feeding sustainably a growing population and support countries in achieving SDGs'.

Do you think that the recommendations of the HLPE report accurately reflect the findings of the report?

Australia is concerned that the report itself places too little attention on 'other innovative approaches to sustainable agriculture', and there are a number of instances where it is implied that agroecology is the sole innovation capable of addressing sustainability, food security and nutrition, while other approaches such as conservation agriculture and not given due attention.

Do you think that major problems are missing from the HLPE recommendations?

See Australia's response to Question 1.

Can you give examples of policies related to agro-ecological systems and other innovation systems for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition? How were these policies formulated and what was their impact?

The Australian Government Smart Farms initiative—part of the National Landcare Program—supports the development and uptake of best practice management, tools and technologies that help farmers and regional communities improve the protection, resilience and productive capacity of our soils, water and vegetation. For example, funding has been provided for a project to promote the practice of strip tillage, which combines cover cropping to supply organic matter to soil to improve crop yields; soil health; and reduce nutrient leaching into waterways and aquifers.

For more information see: https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/natural-resources/landcare/national-landcare-program/australian-government-investment-in-landcare

Are there any other thoughts that you think should be taken into account by the CFS as part of this policy convergence process?

- The use of language throughout the policy convergence process should be balanced and better reflect all possible pathways for transitioning towards sustainable agriculture, not just agroecology.
- It is important that the policy convergence process takes into account the key role of trade in achieving global food security and nutrition, including through open and efficient global markets to maximise food trade flow and avoid recommendations that would distort production or trade, as there is clear evidence that such policies cause environmental harm.
- Modern biotechnologies can benefit farmers and rural communities by increasing the productivity, quality and sustainability credentials of agricultural produce; improving the management of pests, weeds and diseases; and developing new industries. These benefits can be supported through the application of science-based, transparent and predictable regulatory approaches, and ensuring that farmers are able to make informed choices about these technologies.
- It is important to recognise the key role of sustainable agricultural systems in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 2- Zero Hunger. Through the application of context-appropriate methodologies and clear scientific evidence agricultural systems should balance the goals of productivity, food and livelihood security and environmental sustainability.
- Australia questions whether it is the role of the CFS to establish transparent, accountable and inclusive mechanisms to monitor if and how the recommendations of the HLPE report are being implemented (Recommendation 5i)).
- Finally, further information the regarding the proposed 'global observatory for gene editing' (Recommendation 5e)) would be appreciated.