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Outcome of the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity: Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors

Executive Summary

Biodiversity is an important factor for the achievement of food security and improved nutrition. All agricultural sectors (crop and livestock agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) rely on biodiversity and on the ecosystem functions and services they underpin. However, the sectors also affect biodiversity through various direct and indirect drivers. This impact may also affect the agricultural sectors, and therefore potentially food security and nutrition and the provision of vital ecosystem functions and services.

The UN Biodiversity Conference, held by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2016 in Cancun, Mexico, called for the mainstreaming of biodiversity across all agricultural sectors. The Conference also welcomed the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform launched by FAO.

This document introduces the concept of biodiversity mainstreaming and proposes initial steps to be taken by the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform prior to the next Conference of the Parties to the CBD which will be held in November 2018 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to:

- (a) welcome FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform;
- (b) request FAO to facilitate, in collaboration with its partners, the integration of biodiversity across agricultural sectors at national, regional and international levels.

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I. Background

1. Biodiversity is an important factor for the achievement of food security and improved nutrition. All agricultural sectors (crop and livestock agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) rely on biodiversity and on the ecosystem functions and services they underpin. At the same time, these sectors may affect biodiversity through various direct and indirect drivers and the loss of biodiversity may impact the sectors negatively, and therefore potentially food security and nutrition and the provision of ecosystem functions and services. Mainstreaming biodiversity across relevant policies, plans and programmes addressing all the agricultural sectors is thus as essential for halting the loss of biodiversity as it is for achieving food security and improving nutrition.¹
2. FAO has a longstanding history of collaborating with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as evidenced by a number of decisions and joint work programmes adopted or endorsed by the CBD Conference of the Parties and Governing and Statutory Bodies of FAO. In recognition of this, the Cancun UN Biodiversity Conference, *inter alia*, reiterated its invitation to governments to use guidance from FAO related to the agricultural sectors, including the five principles of sustainable food and agriculture² endorsed in 2016 by the FAO Council “*as a basis for the policy dialogue and governance arrangements needed to identify sustainable development pathways across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), across sectors and along related value chains.*”³
3. This document introduces the concept of biodiversity mainstreaming, one of the key outcomes of the UN Biodiversity Conference. It further presents the concept of a Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform (Platform) and seeks guidance from the Conference regarding the development and possible key activities of the Platform.

II. The UN Biodiversity Conference

4. The UN Biodiversity Conference, comprising the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the CBD and meetings of its subsidiary instruments, was held from 4 to 17 December 2016 in Cancun, Mexico. The meeting resulted in significant commitments for action on biodiversity.⁴ Agreements were reached in particular on actions to integrate biodiversity in the agricultural sectors and to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Through the *Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity for Well-Being*, ministers and other heads of delegation committed themselves to work at all levels within their governments and across all sectors to mainstream biodiversity through multiple actions, including through integrating in a structured and coherent manner actions for the conservation, sustainable use, management and restoration of biological diversity and ecosystems into sectoral policies, plans and programmes, as well as legal and administrative measures and budgets.⁵
5. The UN Biodiversity Conference also requested that further guidance be prepared, in collaboration with FAO, on the concept of “sustainability” in food and agriculture with regard to biodiversity.⁶ It invited FAO and its Governing and Statutory Bodies to consider and support the development and implementation of measures, guidance and tools to promote the mainstreaming of biodiversity.⁷ The Conference also welcomed FAO’s platform to mainstream biodiversity across all agricultural sectors, as a tool to build bridges between sectors, identify synergies, align goals and develop integrated cross-sectoral approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity in the agricultural sectors.⁸

¹ FAO (2016). Sustainable Agriculture for Biodiversity – Biodiversity for Sustainable Agriculture.

² FAO (2014). Building a common vision for *sustainable* food and agriculture.

³ CL 155/REP, paragraph 10(b).

⁴ See also CL 156/INF/4, paragraphs 1-4.

⁵ UNEP/CBD/COP/13/24.

⁶ CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3, paragraph 109c.

⁷ CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3, paragraphs 36, 40, 58, 75.

⁸ CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3, paragraph 6.

III. Biodiversity Mainstreaming

6. “Biological diversity” means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.⁹ “Agricultural biodiversity” includes all components of biological diversity of relevance to food and agriculture, and all components of biological diversity that constitute the agricultural ecosystems, also named agro-ecosystems: the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms, at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels, which are necessary to sustain key functions of the agro-ecosystem, its structure and processes.¹⁰

7. Biodiversity forms the basis of all agricultural sectors. It is the basis of **agriculture** as it is at the origin of all crops and domesticated livestock and the variety among them. Essential functions, such as nutrient cycling, decomposition of organic matter, soil formation and rehabilitation, pest and disease regulation, and pollination that benefit crop and livestock production, are maintained by ecosystems which are critical to sustain food production, nutrition and, therefore, human well-being. Marine, coastal and inland ecosystems host a variety of aquatic biological diversity that greatly contribute to the economic, social and cultural aspects of communities around the world. **Fisheries and aquaculture** depend on the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems to maintain economic, social and ecological benefits in the long term. Biodiversity is the source of wild fisheries, and mainstreaming biodiversity in fisheries policies, programmes and plans is key to sustain the habitats which serve as feeding, spawning and nursery sites which are essential for wild fish populations. **Forests** hold the majority of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity. Forest biodiversity includes all the life forms found within forested areas as well as the ecological roles they perform. Prospects for sustainable development will be greatly influenced by the state of diversity of forest ecosystems and species. They provide people with a range of benefits which extend far beyond the provision of timber. The ecosystem services that forests provide are of particular importance for the poor and vulnerable. Furthermore, for many people they are an essential element of cultural identity, spirituality and worldview.

8. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts biodiversity at the centre of many economic activities, particularly those related to sustainable agricultural sectors, calling for the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and the promotion of fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed.

9. SDG 2 aims to *end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*. With these different targets, SDG 2 exemplifies a key feature of the 2030 Agenda which stresses the interrelatedness and interdependence of many SDGs and their targets. Effective reduction of food insecurity and malnutrition depends on sustainable agricultural sectors. Conversely, progress towards SDG 2 will depend on progress made towards several of the other SDGs, including the eradication of poverty and the response to climate change. In order to make progress on SDG 2, policy-makers and stakeholders will need to address such critical interactions, in terms of both synergies and trade-offs, among the different SDG 2 targets and between SDG 2 and the other goals. For example, SDG 14, which aims to *conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources* and SDG 15, to *protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*. Biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors will thus significantly contribute to the achievement of SDGs 2, 14 and 15 and the 2030 Agenda, as a whole.

⁹ Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 2.

¹⁰ Convention on Biological Diversity, Decision V/5, Appendix.

IV. Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform

10. FAO has a long-standing history in pursuing its goal to alleviate poverty and end hunger and malnutrition by promoting sustainable agricultural development and implementing ecosystem approaches. FAO has developed a number of different instruments, guidelines, tools and other technical materials that integrate biodiversity concerns and that prove especially useful if implemented at national levels through coordinated efforts between agriculture and environment constituencies.¹¹

11. FAO's Strategic Programme 2 aiming to '*make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable*', reflects the need for biodiversity mainstreaming by demanding productivity increases in the agricultural sectors to go hand in hand with economic, environmental and social sustainability. Working together with many partners, FAO contributes at multiple levels to biodiversity mainstreaming¹², including through its Sustainable Food and Agriculture Approach (SFA). Avoiding adverse impacts of agricultural practices on biodiversity, ecosystems and natural habitats is a key demand of FAO's *Environmental and Social Management Guidelines*.¹³ FAO's GIAHS programme promotes the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity through management of natural resources based on traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous and local communities.

12. With the recent establishment of a Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Water Department, FAO's Major Area of Work on Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity (MAW-ESB), and informal Member networks under the "Group of Friends of Agroecology" and the recently launched "Group of Friends of Biodiversity and Ecosystems", the Organization is well-positioned to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform.

13. Acting as the Platform, FAO will ensure consideration of biodiversity by its Governing and Statutory Bodies facilitating dialogue among governments, communities of practice and other stakeholders on concrete and coordinated steps to mainstream biodiversity across the agricultural sectors. The Platform will also facilitate the exchange of information and data among stakeholders to reach a common understanding of the status quo, trends and trade-offs in the conservation and use of biodiversity services as well as the exchange of expertise to improve the design and coordination of relevant policies from local to international levels. Acting as the Platform, FAO will assist in translating the richness and variety of forms of knowledge into policy-related forms of knowledge that can be shared among the different agricultural sectors.

14. The ultimate goal of the Platform is the adoption of good practices across all agricultural sectors that will support biodiversity conservation and increase the productivity, stability and resilience of production systems in an integrated landscape/seascape approach, reducing pressure on natural habitats and species. This will also require better coordination among the different agricultural sectors as none of the sectors may address biodiversity in isolation. With its cross-sectoral mandate covering all agricultural sectors FAO is well-placed to act through the Platform as coordinating mechanism.

15. As an early activity, FAO intends to facilitate an informal multi-stakeholder dialogue between the environment and agricultural sectors with a view to identify areas of joint action in developing integrated approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Subject to the availability of the necessary financial resources, a first informal multi-stakeholder dialogue should be held in early 2018.

16. Taking into account the outcome of the multi-stakeholder dialogue, the Platform could in the mid- to longer term develop further activities, including:

- a) Identify policy gaps and governance challenges related to biodiversity in all relevant sectors;

¹¹ For a list, see CBD Notification, *FAO tools and guidance on food and agriculture to assist implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020*.

¹² FAO (2016). *Sustainable Agriculture for Biodiversity – Biodiversity for Sustainable Agriculture*.

¹³ FAO (2015). *Environmental and Social Management Guidelines*, pp.25-28.

- b) Contribute to the achievement of the relevant SDGs and Aichi Biodiversity Targets within the framework of Agenda 2030;
- c) Identify and promote existing governance mechanisms and policy initiatives that effectively mainstream the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity within and across agricultural sectors;
- d) Strengthen bridging processes, at national, regional and international levels to allow the agricultural sectors to learn from each other and from the environment sector, identifying synergies and aligning goals;
- e) Coordinate biodiversity mainstreaming with efforts to conserve and sustainably use genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of their use; and
- f) Lead and coordinate UN system efforts on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors.

Platform partnerships

17. The General Assembly, in adopting Resolution 70/1, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, stressed the importance of implementing Agenda 2030 “based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.”¹⁴ For biodiversity mainstreaming to be effective, it needs to occur across all levels of government and include all relevant stakeholders. Aside from FAO and CBD, a number of other relevant actors, organizations and instruments need to join forces to support the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the conservation and sustainable use of resources. To allow the Platform to work across sectors, bring key players together and build new partnerships that can help to advance the necessary reforms, the Platform needs to be supported by a broad alliance of organizations and stakeholders, including donors, and effectively engage with ongoing mainstreaming initiatives.

18. Through the Platform, FAO will work in a spirit of global solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations and it will facilitate an intensive global engagement bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilize means of implementation from all available sources in support of biodiversity mainstreaming and the implementation of SDG 2 and other relevant Goals, in particular SDGs 14 and 15.

V. Next Steps

19. As a first activity of the Platform, FAO intends to facilitate an informal multi-stakeholder dialogue in early 2018 between the environment and agricultural sectors with a view to identify areas of joint action in developing integrated approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

20. Subsequently, the results of the dialogue will be made available to relevant Governing Bodies of FAO and relevant international instruments and organizations, such as the CBD. More specifically, biodiversity mainstreaming will be considered in 2018 by the FAO Regional Conferences, its Technical Committees, and results by the Conference and the CBD.

¹⁴ A/RES/70/1.