



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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Outcomes of the International Symposium and Regional Meetings on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition

I. Executive Summary

1. The International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition (Rome, September 2014) and the three regional meetings organized by FAO during 2015 in Latin America, Africa and Asia recognized that agroecology plays diverse and important roles. These roles include: (i) enhancing food security and nutrition by ensuring access to nutritious food and prioritizing local food production, distribution and consumption; ii) ensuring the sustainability of the natural resource base, especially through promoting diversified, resilient and adaptable production systems; iii) diversifying sources of income thus reducing social and economic risks; iv) fostering collaborative innovations based on local knowledge and needs; and v) promoting processes that enhance equity and social resilience based on strengthened social and economic relationships at the local level.

2. The outcomes of the regional meetings on agroecology for food security and nutrition were submitted to the respective FAO Regional Conferences, which provided guidance on how to integrate agroecological approaches in FAO's Strategic Programmes and Regional Initiatives, addressing current challenges for the implementation and scaling up of agroecological approaches at global, regional and national levels.

II. Background

3. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) state that agriculture must contribute to ending hunger and malnutrition in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. The fact that enough food is produced globally but hunger and malnutrition has not been eradicated indicates that food production is not a sufficient condition to achieve food security and nutrition. A more productive, sustainable and inclusive food system is needed to enable countries to increase food security and nutrition.

4. Agroecology applies ecological concepts and principles to farming systems, focusing on interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, for food security and nutrition. To harness the sustainability benefits that arise from agroecological approaches, an enabling environment is required, including appropriate policies, institutions and research priorities.

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5. FAO organized an International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition¹ in September 2014 (Rome, Italy) in order to gain a better understanding of the role that agroecology can play in achieving an end to hunger and malnutrition. The Symposium gathered evidence from science and practice on how agroecology can facilitate a transition towards more productive, sustainable and inclusive food systems by enabling countries to produce food while protecting the environment and ensuring social inclusion, in the context of climate change. The Symposium gathered 400 scientists, food producers, policy makers and representatives from the private sector and civil society.

6. Following the recommendations of the International Symposium, three regional meetings on agroecology were organized in Latin America, Africa and Asia. These meetings aimed to continue dialogue and promote understanding of agroecology's benefits, challenges and opportunities at regional and national levels.

7. The outcomes of the International Symposium and the regional meetings² provided comprehensive evidence from science and practice on agroecology's role in the transition towards agricultural models which are restorative, adaptable and inclusive. Section III of this document presents these findings in a detailed manner. They also provided specific recommendations, presented in section IV below, on how to integrate agroecological approaches in FAO's Strategic Programmes and Regional Initiatives, addressing current challenges for the implementation and scaling up of agroecological approaches at global, regional and national levels.

III. Main findings on agroecology's role in sustainable food security and nutrition

8. The international and regional symposia on agroecology for food security and nutrition provided a neutral forum to exchange knowledge, science and experiences from around the world on how agroecology can contribute to sustainable food security and nutrition. The meetings determined the knowledge base needed for the design of ecologically intensive agricultural practices able to sustain food security and nutrition and adapt to local conditions, as described below.

9. With regards to environmental sustainability, the meetings presented evidence that agroecological approaches lead to diversified production systems, which enhance ecological and biological synergies and prevent environmental degradation and pollution. By maintaining the soil's ecological health, preventing surface and underground water pollution and restoring ecosystem services and biodiversity, agroecology ensures the sustainability of the natural resource base. As a result, agricultural systems can become more stable, adaptable and resilient in the face of climate change.

10. With regards to food security and nutrition, the meetings recalled that while adequate quantities of food are produced globally, hunger has not been eradicated, confirming that food production alone does not equate to food security. Field evidence shows that agroecology can enhance food security and nutrition through the prioritization of local food production, distribution and consumption. In fact, there were numerous cases, presented during these meetings, of communities accessing nutritious, diverse and culturally appropriate foods at affordable prices in local markets.

¹ The final report is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4327e.pdf>

² The outcomes of the regional meetings on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition were submitted to the respective FAO Regional Conferences through Information Notes.

Information Note ARC <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp640e.pdf>

Information Note APCR <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp727e.pdf>

Information Note LARC <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp641e.pdf>

11. In regard to economic sustainability and rural development, the symposia demonstrated that diversified production systems can expand farmers' sources of income over time. By enhancing on-farm biodiversity, ecosystem functions and enhanced soil fertility, agroecological approaches decrease farmers' expenditures on external inputs and contribute to reducing economic risks and alleviating poverty. Additionally, agroecology promotes processes that enhance equity and social resilience, thanks to strengthened social and economic relationships at the local level.

12. Finally, the meetings stressed that agroecology underlines the importance of context-specific and continuously adapted knowledge to find solutions for dynamic ecological and human systems. By strengthening local innovation based on local knowledge and needs, agroecological approaches combine farmers' knowledge, including innovative and traditional practices, with scientific knowledge for the design of innovative agricultural systems on the ground.

IV. Main recommendations of the meetings on agroecology

13. The outcomes of the regional meetings on agroecology for food security and nutrition provide recommendations and guidance on how to incorporate agroecology approaches in FAO's Strategic Programmes and Regional Initiatives for sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition at global, regional and national levels.

14. Common recommendations arising from the three regional meetings on agroecology for food security and nutrition are summarized below:

Investing in agroecology through public policies

- Create an enabling environment for agroecology through the adoption of supportive public policies, national budgets, legal frameworks and regulations at sub-national, national and regional levels.
- Increase investment in the development of agroecology in terms of: (i) applied agroecological research, data and statistics; (ii) programs and projects targeting agroecological producers, food systems and markets; (iii) dissemination and exchange of knowledge and best practices.
- Promote inter-sectoral partnerships and South-South Cooperation on agroecology by fostering participatory exchange of experiences and knowledge across territories, countries and regions, engaging civil society organizations, farmers' organizations, governments, academia and researchers.

Climate change

- Recognize the potential of agroecology to ensure adaptation and resilience to climate change by: (i) increasing applied research and data on the role of agroecology in increasing resilience; (ii) ensuring that selection of adapted crop varieties, livestock breeds and tree species takes place at decentralized and local levels; (iii) support the design of agricultural systems based on principles of diversification and integration - including agroforestry and crop-livestock systems; (iv) promoting agroecological systems to restore and regenerate drylands and maintain functional ecosystems in mountains and marginalized areas.

Agroecological innovations

- Promote social innovation and bottom-up participatory research, knowledge and education on agroecology in agricultural research, development and extension services by: (i) fostering regional and national inter-sectoral innovation platforms for agroecology; (ii) strengthening innovation systems for the transition towards sustainable agriculture based on principles of efficiency, recycling, diversification and synergies (iii) recognizing the role of farmers as co-researchers and innovators; (iv) bridging formal and informal innovation processes.

Access to natural resources

- Recognize and promote the role of family farmers and smallholders - in particular rural women and youth's rights and equity - in preserving biodiversity, including traditional varieties and landraces and sustainable management of natural resources through agroecology.
- Ensure smallholders' and family farmers' access to natural resources through agroecology (including land, water, genetic resources, oceans, forests, commons, biodiversity and territories).

Market linkages

- Ensure smallholders and family farmers' access to diversified markets that support agroecological production through: (i) promotion of public procurement policies oriented to promote and scale up agroecological food systems; (ii) advocacy on nutritional value of agroecological products; (iii) the creation and strengthening of local territorial social markets and cooperatives; (iv) empowerment of women and youth through increased employment and income; (v) support the development of institutional innovations and participatory certification schemes for local distribution and consumption.